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The Destruction of Dublin

Frank McDonald

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The cover illustration shows the demolition of no. 4 Burlington Road in 1967. (Photograph by *Martin Reynolds*.)

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For everyone
who really loves Dublin
and for my parents,
who first showed me
the city.

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Frank McDonald
Dublin, June 1985

Introduction

'No city, and certainly not a small, coherently-planned one like Dublin, can endure the thoughtless, day-by-day destruction of its older architecture without endangering its particular identity.'

The Official Guide to Dublin is positively lyrical about the city's charms. Dublin, says the guide, is 'a city of spacious streets, fine buildings and friendly people; a city which combines the beauty of more leisured centuries with modern progressiveness'. That's not all: incredibly, tourists are told that Dublin is 'one of the most charming cities in the world . . . an important capital and, at the same time, the most perfect intact example of an eighteenth-century European city'.

Nobody could blame Dublin Tourism for trying to present their product in the best possible light, but even transient tourists are not that easily conned, which is why their average stay in Dublin is less than two days. They come here expecting to find something of the city of James Joyce, of Behan and O'Casey. Instead, they discover the terrible truth – that Dublin is probably the shabbiest, most derelict city in Europe, chaotic and disorderly like the capital of some Third World country. The tourists, no more than the inhabitants, cannot walk more than a few hundred yards without being confronted by shocking evidence of urban blight. The eyesores are everywhere – weed-strewn derelict sites surrounded by decaying hoardings, dilapidated buildings boarded up and left to face the elements, gap-toothed streets and grotesque modern office blocks. Indeed, the cratered roads and scarred footpaths would do credit to war-torn Beruit.

For those of us who were born here, the sad reality is that we can no longer take pride in calling ourselves Dubliners.

The state of the city is a cause for shame, a cause for outrage. Even our City Fathers are prepared to concede that Dublin is rotting at the core. One former Lord Mayor, Jim Mitchell, confessed some years ago that the city centre had 'about as much character as a second-rate knacker's yard'. And one of his colleagues, battling Alice Glenn, was so embarrassed by the appalling dereliction that she pretended to visiting councillors from abroad that it was all the result of terrorist bombings.

Most of us, having lived with the degradation on a daily basis, are now so de-sensitised that we don't even bother to make excuses anymore. Only visitors and prodigal sons, seeing it afresh, are truly horrified. Stephen Gardiner, architecture critic of *The Observer*, is more shocked every time he comes here. 'Suddenly Dublin has become a shabby city – shabby because its centre is peppered with crude concrete structures, flashy mirror-glass facades and other inappropriate schemes which have no connection at all with the spirit of the place', he wrote in 1979. 'Some say what's happening in Paris is just as bad – look at La Défense. It is appalling; but at least the French have made sure that, on the whole, developers go mad outside the city's centre. In Dublin, the destruction is from within.'

Almost fifteen years ago, Lewis Mumford, the distinguished American urban philosopher, gave his stark verdict. 'Dublin', he said, 'exhibits the worst aspects of the collapse of twentieth-century urban structure and is on its way to becoming a non-city.' The chilling route charted by Mumford had its landmarks – the ESB's gutting of Fitzwilliam Street, the battle for Hume Street, the row over the Central Bank, the rape of Wood Quay – but these were merely the more notorious milestones on the relentless march of destruction. Nothing, it seemed, was sacred. For John Simpson, the BBC's diplomatic correspondent, the demolition of the Royal Hibernian Hotel in 1984 was the final straw. 'Eleven years ago, when I was the BBC's correspondent in Dublin, the Hibernian was my office and sometimes my home, and I am naturally sad that it too should have fallen victim to the developers', he said in a letter to the *Irish Times*. 'But the loss of this fine building is not simply a personal one; it is Dublin's and

Ireland's loss as well. No city, and certainly not a small, coherently-planned one like Dublin, can endure the thoughtless, day-by-day destruction of its older architecture without endangering its particular identity.'

Bob Geldof, characteristically, was rather less diplomatic. At a civic reception in the Mansion House to mark his outstanding success in raising millions for Africa's famine victims, the outspoken rock singer laid it squarely on the line. In front of the Lord Mayor, the City Manager and other big-wigs, he railed against the destruction of his native Dublin. 'This city has become increasingly brutalised', he said. 'The people have lost some of their openness, and I think a lot of it is largely due to the destruction of the city itself, which was once one of the prettiest cities in these islands and is now a shambolic mess, at best. Tomorrow, I have to bring some of the BBC around the city to show them some of the things I remember and love about the place. Unfortunately, when I went through the list of my memories, 50 per cent of the things I liked had disappeared, to be replaced by the most mediocre, unaesthetic, architecturally inarticulate buildings I've ever seen in my life. They are a scandal. They can only be the product of back-handers, political corruption and moral degradation.

'When a city is being destroyed by its custodians, then what are the people who live in it supposed to think? The brutalisation seeps through, in the increased use of drugs, which is epidemic in this city, the street violence and the rudeness that is almost everywhere. And I'm sorry if my image clashes with the tourist image of it, but that's what I've seen over thirty-two years. As I say, it's very nice to come home and it's particularly nice to be honoured in this way. But please stop destroying Dublin, and please get rid of those buildings that offend us all, that make us so depressed. And, please, bring back to this city some of the life and the beauty that was there when I grew up with it, and make it somewhere that's nice to come home to – especially if you've been somewhere like Ethiopia.'

The City Fathers, assembled in the Oak Room of the Mansion House, were taken aback by Geldof's outburst; it cut them to the quick. More than twenty years earlier, they

had been given a legislative mandate to make Dublin a better place to live in. And much as some of them might not like to admit it, deep-down they knew that they had failed – and failed miserably. The 1963 Planning Act was supposed to herald the dawn of a new era. It was, as the long-title proclaimed, 'An Act to make provision, in the common good, for the proper planning and development of cities, towns and other areas, whether urban or rural (including the preservation and improvement of the amenities thereof). . .' The legislation contained ninety-two sections, running to more than two hundred pages, and it gave local authorities – including Dublin Corporation – wide powers to further the cause of 'positive planning'. Bureaucratic cobwebs were to be swept away and the Corporation was to prepare a Development Plan for the city, to be reviewed and updated every five years.

Back in 1963, when the Planning Act was passed by the Oireachtas, Dublin was certainly a poorer place, but at least it had some coherence. After twenty-two years of 'planning', the city is a mess. Sure, there has been 'urban renewal', lots of it, but mostly in areas that didn't need to be renewed. We have had an unprecedented boom in office development. Almost three hundred new blocks have been built, producing a total of ten million square feet of modern office space with a combined capital value exceeding one billion pounds. Yet scarcely a dozen of these buildings could be regarded as good modern architecture. But then, aesthetic considerations played almost no part in their design, construction or location. For office blocks are not like other buildings; they are crude investment vehicles for pension funds and insurance companies. By allowing them to be built here, there and everywhere, regardless of the social and environmental cost, we have effectively sacrificed our city for the sake of our pensions.

Office blocks didn't just deface the city; they helped to kill it as well. Once-thriving streets, where people used to live above the shops, were ruthlessly denuded of their population. The inhabitants were uprooted and forced to move to the suburbs or, worse still, to the 'new towns' far out of the city's perimeter. As the office blocks took over, streets were left for dead after six o'clock every evening, to become mugging alleys where people walked in fear and dread. Belatedly, the Corporation tried to staunch the population haemorrhage with its much-praised inner city housing programme. At the same time, however, the Corporation's own engineers were reinforcing the trend towards a lifeless city through their destructive road plans. And it's not as if nobody shouted stop. Fierce battles were fought along the way by intermittently well-organised conservation groups. But at the end of the day, the city is in such bad shape that one is left wondering would it have been any worse if they hadn't intervened. Indeed, the Georgian lobby's only real success was entirely unintentional; by campaigning so hard to save the threatened eighteenth-century terraces in the city centre, they helped in no small way to spawn the mutant of fake-Georgian semis in the suburbs.

So who is responsible for the destruction of Dublin? Was it the politicians who were so willing to fix things for their friends at the city's expense? Or the planners who, as Mumford said, had 'second-rate minds'? Or the architects, who so often seemed like cretins wielding clutch-pencils. Or the developers and speculators, for whom the city became a crock of gold? This book attempts to answer these questions by throwing some light on the dark recesses of the property world. In doing so, it does not purport to be a work of social history, still less a rambling reminiscence about Dublin in the rare old times. It is primarily a book about the destruction of the historic city's *built* environment over the past twenty-five years, about the people who did it and about how they got away with it. As such, it does not deal with the enormous suburban expansion in the same period which, frighteningly, has made Dublin the fastest-growing city in Europe. That is another day's work.

One

'The only reason why Dublin remained for so long the beautiful eighteenth-century city the English built is that the Irish were too poor to pull it down. This, unfortunately, is no longer the case.'

Nineteen sixty is a long time ago. It was the year John F. Kennedy was elected President of the United States, the year Irish soldiers were killed at Niemba. A packet of twenty cigarettes cost three shillings, a wool-worsted suit could be bought for less than £11, a Ford Anglia de luxe for £535 and a four-bedroom semi-detached house in Bushy Park Road for £2,900. Building societies were offering depositors 'attractive' interest rates of 3½ per cent, experienced secretaries were getting £500 per annum, a flat in Ballsbridge could be rented for just £2 10s 0d a week and the *Irish Times* cost four (old) pence.

There were no supermarkets, let alone shopping centres, and Dublin had only one large modern office block. That was at Busaras in Store Street. A phenomenon in its day, it was one of the first major building projects started in Europe after the end of World War II and architects came from far and wide just to see it under construction. It had been designed by Michael Scott, the great architectural impressario, *bon vivant* and patron of the arts. And, ironically enough, despite the great building boom that followed, it was Busaras that was chosen to represent twentieth-century Irish architecture in the definitive stamp series issued in 1983.

In 1960, Ireland was being dragged out of a lengthy period of stagnation by the First Programme for Economic Expansion, spearheaded by the then Taoiseach, Sean Lemass, and T. K. Whitaker, secretary of the Department of Finance and the

first economist in Ireland to achieve guru status. In their drive for progress and prosperity, Dublin was bound to be rebuilt. Unlike other great European cities, it hadn't grown up in the nineteenth century. As a deposed capital after 1800, the city's development had been stunted. True, there was much outward expansion in the Victorian period, mainly following the railways, but the scale of the city centre hardly changed – apart from the commercial core around Dame Street and College Green, where four storeys gave way to five and six.

The brave new world which Dublin was poised to enter was ushered in by the architectural correspondent of the *Irish Times* in an article published, almost symbolically, on 31 December 1959. 'It is well-known that, as far as the central city is concerned, the days of Dublin's Georgian heritage are numbered and that when these decayed and obsolete monuments of a past age come to be demolished, many of their sites will be redeveloped with buildings much larger in bulk and greater in height than the present ones'. As far as he was concerned, an ultra-modern steel and glass tower block 'may live quite happily beside a Georgian terrace'. It was an ominous pointer to the future.

But before the city could be reshaped in this fashion, it had to be abandoned. For more than a century, the middle and upper classes had been moving out to new suburban areas like Ballsbridge, Clontarf and Rathmines. This wealth drain left the city centre as a preserve of the poor, who had more pressing matters to worry about than its fading Georgian grandeur. Unlike Edinburgh, where well-heeled professional people actually lived in the city and had enough political clout to secure its preservation, Dublin was suffering from an acute lack of indigenous defenders.

And it wasn't just the rich who fled to the suburbs. The city was perceived as not the place to be by a wide variety of institutions. Esso became the first of many private companies to relocate when it moved out to Galloping Green in August 1960. And when the government decided to set up Telefis Eireann, it was regarded as only natural that the new television centre would be built on a suburban site rather than in the city itself. The 23-acre Montrose estate, near Donnybrook, had been acquired by the Department of Posts

and Telegraphs and the award-winning television studios, designed by Michael Scott and Partners, were completed there in the autumn of 1961. Inevitably, Radio Eireann later moved out of its cramped accommodation in the GPO to a new radio centre in the growing Montrose broadcasting complex. This was built on a six-acre site, formerly the playing fields of St Andrew's College, which RTE bought for the then staggering sum of £17,500 an acre. The college, once based in St Stephen's Green and later in Ballsbridge, used this windfall to help pay for the building of a new school even further out of the city, in Booterstown. Other schools followed. In 1966, Wesley College also decided to leave St Stephen's Green for a 50-acre site in faraway Ballinteer, while the High School quit Harcourt Street for Rathgar. King's Hospital turned its back on two centuries of history by selling the Blue Coat School in Blackhall Place and moved to Palmerstown. Similarly, Alexandra College vacated its 'very inconvenient' Victorian buildings in Earlsfort Terrace in favour of a new school complex in Milltown. Others simply closed down, like the Sacred Heart Convent in Leeson Street or the Holy Faith in Dominick Street. But in almost every case, the property they left behind was snapped up by voracious speculators for new office developments.

By far the worst disaster in this mania for moving out was UCD's decision to abandon Earlsfort Terrace. The extremely ill-advised move to Belfield was the brainchild of the college's president, Michael Tierney. A Galwayman with a Catholic peasant outlook, Tierney was motivated by a venomous hatred of Trinity College that was almost inarticulate. He saw it as his sacred mission to take UCD out of the Protestant university's sphere of influence and that meant getting out of town. Since 1934, UCD had sports grounds at Belfield, off the Stillorgan Road, and Tierney used this as a base for expansion. From 1949 to 1958, without ever consulting the government, he pursued a vigorous programme of property acquisition until he had assembled a 250-acre land-holding in the area for a total outlay of £255,000. Like the Israelis on the West Bank, he was in the business of creating facts on the ground.

The government eventually appointed a commission to

advise on the matter, but its membership include not one architect, planner or surveyor. In 1959, this commission endorsed the move to Belfield, rubber-stamping Tierney's *fait accompli*. Aodogán O'Rahilly was the sole dissenter. In his view, common sense dictated some form of amalgamation between UCD and Trinity, with the accommodation needs of both colleges being met through the acquisition of adjoining properties.

The Belfield adventure was also vigorously opposed by the Tuairim group. In a lengthy report, published in January 1960, they warned that the move would result in 'grave losses' to the college itself and to the city. 'In Dublin, we have a cultural and educational complex of unique value, on the merits of which the President, Mr de Valera, has expressed himself. It is situated in one of the finest parts of the city and includes Trinity College, the Institute for Advanced Studies, the College of Surgeons and the College of Technology in Kevin Street as well as the National Library, Museum and Gallery', the report said. 'Everything possible should be done to strengthen this complex.'

But the die was cast and, despite this last-minute appeal, the government gave its blessing to UCD's plans. Tierney, in any case, also had the backing of John Charles McQuaid, the powerful and greatly feared Archbishop of Dublin. He saw the move to Belfield tying in very neatly with his own plans to transfer St Vincent's, the state's largest Catholic teaching hospital, from St Stephen's Green to Elm Park – not far from Belfield itself. Thus, a great Catholic axis would be created in the suburbs, counterbalancing the pernicious orbit of Trinity and the Protestant teaching hospitals in the city centre. The new St Vincent's complex, a dated and thoroughly unattractive group of buildings designed by Downes Meehan and Robson, opened in 1970 – a year after the bulk of UCD's staff and students were packed off to Belfield.

There can be no doubt that UCD, had the will been there, could have acquired a great deal of property in and around Earlsfort Terrace – including a large number of sites later bought up by office developers. An area stretching from St Stephen's Green towards the Grand Canal could have been

reserved for university expansion in Dublin Corporation's 1957 Planning Scheme for the city. But it wasn't, largely because Tierney and McQuaid were already set on their suburban ideas. The Corporation's chief planning officer at the time was Michael O'Brien, a quiet Drogheda-born engineer, and he was a staunch member of the Knights of St Columbanus. It was well known that he was also 'the Archbishop's man' in Dublin Corporation. 'He was on the phone to Drumcondra all the time', one former colleague recalled. He also had regular meetings with the Archbishop in his palace to discuss the planning of the city. Thus, when the Corporation proposed building two-bedroom houses on a new estate in Finglas, McQuaid put his foot down. As far as he was concerned, Catholic couples needed more breeding space, and that was the end of that. And when the Corporation set about acquiring the Shaw estate in Terenure for what was to become Bushy Park, someone discovered that Michael O'Brien had done a private deal with the Archbishop whereby the best part of the land, where most of the mature trees were, was given to an order of nuns to set up an exclusive convent school.

Much more damaging in its impact was the property deal masterminded by McQuaid at Marino. The Nazareth Sisters had offered to provide a home for elderly people, a laudable enough project in itself, so the Archbishop arranged that they would get a chunk of the land surrounding the O'Brien Institute, which was run by the Christian Brothers. And so confident was he that the Corporation would give its seal of approval that work got under way several months *before* permission was granted. It didn't seem to matter to the chief planning officer or anyone else in the city bureaucracy that the Nazareth House development would destroy the largely unspoilt environs of Lord Charlemont's Casino, perhaps the most perfect piece of architecture ever built in Ireland. And though the Casino was the *only* eighteenth-century building which had been designated as a national monument, the Office of Public Works did nothing to defend it against this intrusive modern scheme. 'How could we have objected to an old people's home, for God's sake?', said Percy Le Clerc, former inspector of national monuments. More to the point,

there was no way the state – or the Corporation – would have risked a confrontation with John Charles McQuaid.

As well as catering for the Archbishop, the Corporation's chief planning officer was at the beck and call, throughout the 1950s and '60s, of a succession of Fianna Fáil government ministers who were anxious to fix things for their friends. However, Michael O'Brien was not a corrupt man; he merely saw it as his duty to facilitate the politicians, where possible. 'Harmless' is the word often used to describe him. 'He always played wicketkeeper and he never bowled a ball in his life', said one of those who worked with him.

Apart from being indecisive, O'Brien had no real concept of planning, so the 1957 Planning Scheme was drawn up by his deputy, Kevin I. Nowlan, who went on to become Professor of Town Planning at UCD. The Corporation had no wish to draw up this planning scheme, but it was forced to do so by a High Court order following an action by a developer who had been repeatedly refused permission for a housing development. Until then, the planners had been quite happy muddling along, turning down applications for development without incurring any liability for compensation. Only when a formal planning scheme was adopted would the Corporation have to pay up – hence its extreme reluctance to draft such a scheme.

The preservation of Dublin's architectural heritage did not rate very highly at the time. Despite the publication in 1952 of Maurice Craig's masterly work, *Dublin 1660-1860*, there was hardly any public interest in the subject. Thus, there was no real pressure on the Corporation to protect the historic city under the new planning scheme. The Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland (RIAI) sought to have most of the southside Georgian core area listed for preservation – including Fitzwilliam Street, Lower Baggot Street, Upper Mount Street, Hume Street, Ely Place, Clare Street and Lower Leeson Street. But the planners and the city councillors ignored this recommendation and limited the preservation zone just to Merrion Square and Fitzwilliam Square. In effect, what the Corporation was saying was that the only parts of Dublin worth preserving were these two Georgian squares and nothing else. This amounted to a charter for the demolition

of the city and, as such, it was to have the most appalling consequences.

The shock troops for the destruction of Dublin were provided not by greedy speculators but by the state and local government. In August 1957, the Office of Public Works (OPW) dealt the first cruel blow by demolishing two impressive Georgian houses in Kildare Place, beside the National Museum. Echoing a view quite common at the time among narrow-minded nationalists that Georgian architecture was part of the legacy of '800 years of oppression', one government minister actually said, 'I was glad to see them go. They stood for everything I hate.' After the two houses had been reduced to rubble, the OPW built nothing more on the site than a hideous brown-brick wall. And in the same year, the Corporation started pulling down most of Lower Dominick Street, where the early Georgian houses were among the city's finest and each interior was a work of art. Mostly in tenement use, the Corporation regarded them as slums and they were soon replaced by a remarkably vulgar scheme of flat blocks, designed by Desmond FitzGerald, Garret's elder brother.

Controversy over these demolitions led to the formation of the Irish Georgian Society, with the twin aim of awakening public interest in Ireland's heritage of Georgian architecture and spearheading a campaign for its preservation. The prime movers in this well-intentioned crusade were the Hon. Desmond Guinness, a son of Lord Moyne, and his wife Mariga, the daughter of Prince Albrecht von Urach, Count of Wurttemberg. Socially glittering and with such good pedigrees, they quickly assembled a corps of like-minded people, many of them also titled. Apart from the Guinnesses, the society's first committee, elected in January 1959, included Lord Talbot de Malahide; Sir Alfred Beit, Bart; Lady Dunsany; Sir George Mahon, Bart; and Desmond Fitz-Gerald, Knight of Glin. In short, they were the remnants of the ascendancy seeking to preserve what was perceived as the heritage of the ascendancy. It was no wonder that Kevin Boland, later Minister for Local Government, would refer to them as the 'belted earls'. They were also quite self-indulgent. Thus, one whole issue of the society's quarterly bulletin was

devoted to an article on Glin, Co Limerick, by the Knight of Glin, while another was largely given over to a dissertation on Dutch-style architecture in the Cape Province by Sir Alfred Beit, himself the heir to a South African diamond fortune.

While these dilettantes were amusing themselves, the pace of redevelopment in Dublin was gathering momentum. In the days of the Lemass-Whitaker boom, to be 'modern' was everything. Even semi-state bodies sought to create a new image for themselves, more suited to the emerging era of the merchant adventurers. CIE, the not yet ailing public transport company, ripped out two decent house facades in O'Connell Street in 1961 to make way for a curtain-walled passenger information bureau featuring stained-glass work by Evie Hone. And in Dame Street, the Insurance Corporation of Ireland re-faced a group of four older buildings with a modern front more fitting for its headquarters. (Less than twenty years later, it was to become Dublin's first derelict office block, frequently covered in bill posters and bricked up to await the inevitable demolition gang.)

The headlong rush for modernity in the early 1960s extended far beyond mere facades. In 1958, a new Office Premises Act laid down minimum standards for all office buildings employing more than five clerks. It covered toilets, washing facilities, lighting, heating, ventilation and overcrowding. The rabbit-warrens that passed for offices in partitioned Georgian houses rarely, if ever, met these requirements, so the new Act provided yet another impetus for redevelopment. The state-owned Irish Life Assurance Company was among the first to provide a better standard of accommodation for its employees when, in 1962, it moved from Hammam Buildings in O'Connell Street to a purpose-built five-storey office block at Mespil Road, on the tree-lined banks of the Grand Canal. This L-shaped building, designed by Downes Meehan and Robson, is set around an attractive landscaped courtyard and it must be rated as one of the better examples of modern architecture in Dublin. Now let to the Blood Transfusion Service, the building was also a trend-setter in transforming the Ballsbridge area into a prime office zone. And if its erection meant the loss of four late Georgian houses, well that was simply the price of progress.

Just across the canal, at Baggot Street Bridge, two more old houses disappeared to make way for the very functional Bord Fáilte headquarters, designed in the Miesian manner by Michael Scott and Partners. A year later, in 1963, Robinson Keefe and Devane looked to Le Corbusier for their inspiration for P. J. Carroll's new office building at Grand Parade, further along the canal.

College Green was also the focus of frenetic redevelopment activity. Two British insurance companies whipped away elegant Victorian buildings on both sides of what used to be Daly's Club to build brash new office blocks in styles as different as chalk and cheese. Another highly decorative late Victorian edifice, replete with crow-stepped gables and a conical tower, on the corner of Andrew Street and Trinity Street, was demolished even earlier and replaced by a dreary modern block, occupied for many years by the Department of Post and Telegraphs. And right opposite the old Parliament Building on College Green, the National Bank (now part of the Bank of Ireland group) actually wanted to tear down their fine classical headquarters, statue of Hibernia and all, and put up a glass and steel block in its place. Fortunately their architect, Robin Walker of Michael Scott and Partners, persuaded the bankers to confine themselves to a modern extension on Suffolk Street. But such was the mood of the time that, had the bank persisted with the original scheme, the Corporation would not have stood in their way and College Green would look very different today. In Grafton Street, for example, Woolworth's had no trouble getting permission to hack down a fine Victorian facade, with twinkling panes of glass in moulded timber frames. And what the company's Liverpool-based 'architects' put up there was a new shop premises which, as the *Irish Builder* said, merely 'epitomised the vulgarity to which so-called modern architecture can sink'.

Certainly, there was not a peep of protest in 1961 when New Ireland Assurance got rid of five early eighteenth-century houses in South Frederick Street to put up the characterless curtain-walled office block occupied by ICI (Ireland) Ltd. Perhaps the Georgian Society didn't know about the fine rococo ceilings in these deceptively simple houses. But even if

they did, there was precious little they could have done about it. Under the 1934 Planning Act, only those with an 'interest' in a particular property could appeal to the Minister – and this was interpreted narrowly as a *legal* interest. (The remaining houses on the west side of South Frederick Street were later listed for protection but, despite earnest appeals from conservation groups, New Ireland got planning permission in 1979 to replace them with a 'Georgian-style' office block. Four years later, in the autumn of 1983, they were pulled down along with a varied group of shop buildings in Nassau Street, around the corner. Since then, the cleared site has been in use as a 'temporary' surface car park.)

New Ireland Assurance was established in 1924 by Dr James Ryan, who would later become a perennial Minister for Finance in successive Fianna Fáil administrations, and it is now headed by his son, Senator Eoin Ryan, though control of the once nationally-minded company has passed into foreign hands. In 1963, the company provided itself with a new headquarters in Dawson Street, featuring bronze doors and balconies with Celtic motifs in an eccentric adaptation of the international style. It was jointly designed by Patrick Campbell and Morris McCullough and Associates, who have done almost all of New Ireland's work largely because of family ties going back to its foundation. Some years later, McCullough's (yes, the same family) would obligingly give up their music shop next door so that New Ireland could build a new office block there.

Insurance companies are natural predators in the property world, and nowhere is this more obvious than at the corner of Dawson Street and Nassau Street. Here, throughout the 1960s, the Norwich Union Group relentlessly gobbled up a rich and varied collection of fifteen Georgian and Victorian buildings – including Elvery's corner shop – and replaced them with a series of three anonymous office blocks, relieved only by shops at street level. All designed by Lardner and Partners, the earliest of these monsters is undoubtedly the worst. T-shaped, with five storeys on the Nassau Street frontage and eight storeys behind, its high beige brick gable wall is an ugly protrusion on the skyline when viewed from College Green. 'With all this depersonalised insurance com-

pany architecture springing up in Dublin, where is your city going to be, boys, in a few years time?', asked *Build* magazine. 'The fault for this lies squarely with the form of building control exercised by Dublin Corporation, which takes no account of the character, such as it once was, of this city.'

Right on the very edge of Fitzwilliam Square, illustrating the nonsense of the Corporation's limited 'preservation' policy, the Commissioners of Irish Lights were permitted to demolish three houses right in the middle of a Georgian terrace to build a new headquarters. They could have followed the example of Cement Ltd, just across the street, by building in a 'replica' Georgian style, but they didn't – probably because their architects thought it would be dishonest. Cement Ltd's 'reconstruction', involving one house at the corner of Fitzwilliam Square and several others in Pembroke Street, had been executed in 1957 by Desmond FitzGerald, which makes him the indisputable father of Georgian pastiche in Dublin. For the Corporation, in this and other cases, the main obsession of the planners was to ensure that each new office block had sufficient car parking space for its staff. The Cement Ltd block didn't, and the company was later allowed to pull down two more houses in Pembroke Street solely for the purpose of providing a squalid surface car park, part of it housed in a shed.

Comhlucht Siúcre Eireann had much grander ideas. The state-owned sugar company had acquired the Magdalen Asylum, near the corner of Earlsfort Terrace and Lower Leeson Street and, in 1960, an architectural competition was held for the design of a new headquarters on this site. The winners were Liam Boyle and Seamus Delaney, two architects then working in the Corporation's housing department, and they set up in private practice on the strength of this success. Their scheme was for a slab block, eight storeys on a plinth, straddling the site and looming over the south-east corner of St Stephen's Green. But even this massive intrusion into an essentially Georgian streetscape got planning permission almost immediately and the building was completed by 1964.

The state was going to trump them all, however. In 1962, the OPW unveiled its incredible proposals for a twenty-storey

office complex on the site of Beggar's Bush Barracks. In a scheme drawn up by its own chief architect, Raymond McGrath, this huge tower was to be a full sixty feet higher than Liberty Hall, Dublin's tallest building, then under construction. Designed to accommodate 1,400 civil servants, the tower was to be flanked by three-storey blocks set around a reflecting pool. And all of this was to be erected on an already elevated site. The scheme was never built, but its impact can be imagined by observing how the more modest seven-storey block, built on the same site in 1983, offensively dominates the entire area

Writing about the redevelopment boom some years after it started, a visiting commentator – H. A. N. Brockman, architecture critic of the *Financial Times* – gave his verdict which, though somewhat glib, contained a solid grain of truth. He said, 'The only reason why Dublin remained for so long the beautiful eighteenth-century city the English built is that the Irish were too poor to pull it down. This, unfortunately, is no longer the case.' And what was it being pulled down for? Mostly to make way for the kind of architecture that could be found in almost any 'modern' city anywhere in the world. In 1962, with remarkable prescience, the *Irish Architect and Contractor* said in an editorial, 'Judging by the buildings architects as a body have erected here in the last twenty years and the streetscape they have created, Anna Livia will be an ugly, lined hag by 1982.'

Two

'It has no special architectural coherence. It is not a planned facade, nor an architectural entity. It is simply one damned house after another. The houses are a sloppy, uneven series. . . . It is nearly always wrong to preserve rubbish and, by Georgian standards, these houses are rubbish.'

The battle for Fitzwilliam Street was the first of many bitter struggles fought out in the streets of Dublin between the forces of barbarism and civilisation. At stake was the fate of sixteen late eighteenth-century houses which formed part of the longest and arguably the finest Georgian streetscape in the world, extending three-fifths of a mile from Holles Street hospital to Lower Leeson Street. For the sake of mere convenience, the Electricity Supply Board was determined to demolish these houses to make way for a modern office block. But the board's diabolical plan for Fitzwilliam Street was vigorously opposed by the Irish Georgian Society which, for once, organised a spirited campaign that won widespread public support. It was an immense cultural confrontation between two irreconcilable views of Ireland and the fact that, in the end, the ESB won the argument was an outright disaster for Dublin.

Like all large organisations, the ESB had humble beginnings. It was established in 1927, amid some controversy, to plan and manage the state's first venture into electricity generation – the Ardnacrusha hydro-electric scheme on the River Shannon. In the same year, the board and its staff of four set up headquarters in a drawingroom flat in 28 Lower Fitzwilliam Street. That was the incubus for a great cancer which spread out to engulf, over a period of thirty years, almost the entire east side of the street as well as part of

Upper Mount Street and all of East James Street. In the mid-1950s, the ESB locked itself into this extensive property holding in the very heart of Georgian Dublin by building a seven-story office block right behind the houses on Fitzwilliam Street. But this was no ordinary office block. It housed the board's load distribution office, which controls the supply of electricity to the whole country. Quite literally, it is the nerve centre of the national grid. There were no technical reasons why this vital facility needed to be in Dublin at all. It could have been built almost anywhere, even at Ardnacrusha, but the ESB insisted on building it right behind its Dublin headquarters. The stage was then set for the rape of Fitzwilliam Street.

In December 1961, ending months of rumours, the ESB announced that there would be an architectural competition for the design of a new block of offices replacing the Georgian houses at 13-28 Lower Fitzwilliam Street. However, the board's arguments for demolishing the houses were patently spurious. They claimed that the houses were 'structurally unsound' – but, if this was so, it was largely because they were destabilised during construction work on the earlier office block. (In any case, almost all Georgian houses can be condemned as 'structurally unsound' because they don't meet modern building standards.) The ESB argued that the interiors of the houses were of 'no architectural interest' – but this was due to the fact that they had been mercilessly hacked about by the ESB itself over the years. Then, there was the usual panic about the discovery of dry rot in the roof timbers – but, here again, this malady could have been cured had the will been there. In the end, the board's essential bankruptcy in the whole affair was exposed when its own chairman, Thomas Murray, admitted that they had intended to demolish the Fitzwilliam Street houses as far back as 1936 and the scheme was only shelved because of the onset of the Emergency.

The ESB's plans were greeted with horror – and not just by the Georgian Society. In a lengthy editorial, the *Irish Times* urged its readers to 'stand outside Holles Street hospital and look up towards the Dublin Mountains. What would Canaletto have made of that view? . . . Consider Venice and

the cities of Italy. Venice, indeed! How long would our demolition squads allow her to queen it in the Adriatic? And in Pisa, the Leaning Tower would have come down years ago. The authorities would have taken advice from experts that it was impossible to straighten it.' As for the ESB's architectural competition, the *Irish Times* said this was 'a splendid idea. The only mistake is the choice of site.'

Both sides hired English knights to champion their causes. On the advice of its architectural consultants, the ESB engaged Sir John Summerson, a leading authority on Georgian architecture, to pronounce the last rites over Fitzwilliam Street under the guise of providing an 'independent' opinion. His predilictions were all too apparent; he had a great passion for Palladian set-pieces, but cared little for Georgian domestic street architecture. None the less, his report was quite moderate in tone, describing the 'impressive completeness and uniformity' of the whole area as 'a historic legacy of great value', but saying – to nobody's surprise – that the 'only reasonable course' for the ESB's purposes was 'to rebuild to an entirely new design'. Later, in an interview published in the Georgian Society's bulletin, he was notably more blunt about the merits of Fitzwilliam Street. 'It has no special architectural coherence. It is not a planned facade, nor an architectural entity. It is simply one damned house after another', he declared. 'The houses are a sloppy, uneven series. . . . It is nearly always wrong to preserve rubbish and, by Georgian standards, these houses are rubbish.' He was asked if he had talked to any of the preservation interests during his brief visit to Dublin. 'No', he replied. 'I made a point of meeting as few people as possible.' (Sir John is still at it. In 1983, at the lengthy public inquiry in London on the controversial plan to build a Mies van der Rohe tower block in Mansion House Square, he appeared for the developers and airily dismissed the terrace of listed Victorian buildings on the site as 'not a bad job for a beginner'.)

The Georgian Society's champion was Sir Albert Richardson, who was also a leading authority on monumental architecture – although his *magnum opus* on the subject had been published in 1912. Sir Albert, a dead-ringer for Charles Laughton, was 82 years old when he became embroiled in the Fitzwilliam

Street controversy and he was also more than somewhat senile. At a crammed protest meeting in the Mansion House, in January 1962, Sir Albert caused widespread shock and embarrassment when he revealed his solution to the ESB problem. Of course the houses in Fitzwilliam Street should be preserved, he said. But he had an even better idea. The ESB should build an 'electricity palace' behind them in the form of a skyscraper surmounted by a revolving gilded statue of Mercury, which he felt would be an appropriate symbol for a power-generating board.

Other speakers at the meeting, which attracted 900 people with 200 more being turned away at the door, included Micheal MacLiammoir, who urged them to defend Dublin's great heritage even if it meant grappling with steel hooks, and Sean Keating, then president of the Royal Hibernian Academy. He warned that if the ESB were successful in its efforts to destroy Fitzwilliam Street, 'the next move will be to feed the books in the Library of Trinity College to the boilers of the Pigeon House'. Among the many messages of support was a telegram from Sidney Charles Herbert, 16th Earl of Pembroke and Montgomery, whose family had for generations looked after Fitzwilliam Street as ground landlords of the Pembroke Estate. In an effort to save the threatened houses, Lord Pembroke offered the ESB a comparable site on the far side of East James Street – but this was blithely turned down. Instead, the board compulsorily acquired Pembroke's freehold title to the Fitzwilliam Street houses and he was paid the derisory sum of £1,000. He immediately gave half of it to the Georgian Society to help finance their campaign against the ESB's plans.

Significantly, two groups of architecture students attended the Mansion House meeting to demonstrate *in favour* of the redevelopment of Fitzwilliam Street. 'Don't make Dublin a museum', was one of their catch-cries. Two months earlier, the Architectural Association had held a public debate on a motion deploring 'the repeated attacks on our Georgian heritage'. It attracted what one report described as a 'witheringly small audience', and the motion was defeated on a show of hands. The RIAI *Yearbook* for 1961 carried a symbolic cover photograph of the doomed Fitzwilliam Street houses –

but not a word about the controversy inside. As the *Irish Builder* commented, 'Here in one picture we have old Dublin speaking to us, but not loud enough to drown the cries of the wild building craze that is going on all over our city.'

The silence of the architects' institute was ominous. After all, they had called for the preservation of Fitzwilliam Street five years earlier. Now, they were acquiescing in the ESB's plans to destroy it. In fact, the RIAI had performed an unprincipled somersault and it was even suggested that they had been 'purchased by the ESB with the promise of a competition'. Finally, in February 1962, the council of the institute said they accepted the ESB's contention that the houses were 'structurally unsound' and they were also 'satisfied that a new building need not destroy the beauty of the existing environment'. It was a remarkable *volte face* which, as one commentator said, 'brought dishonour on the profession as a whole'.

The results of the much-vaunted competition was announced in November 1962. Out of a total of forty-five entries, half of them from Britain, the first prize of £1,500 was awarded to the newly established and relatively unknown firm of Stephenson Gibney and Associates. The assessors, who included Sir Hugh Casson (yet another English knight), said the winning facade had 'considerable elegance and dignity and it fits politely but not too self-effacingly into the street picture'. All entries proposing Georgian pastiche solutions were discarded. As far as the chairman of the ESB was concerned, the result of the competition 'demonstrates that the architects of the eighteenth century did not have a monopoly in talent, imagination and good taste'.

For Sam Stephenson and Arthur Gibney, their success in the ESB competition opened the door to an architectural bonanza that was to last well into the 1970s. They had set up practice together two years earlier on the strength of winning an earlier ESB competition for the design of a house 'incorporating ways in which electricity could be used to make life easier'. Both still in their twenties, they established their first office on the top floor of the exclusive Brown Thomas department store in Grafton Street. The office was specifically designed to impress the store's wealthy customers. Decorated

in the Japanese manner, with *shoshi* screens and rush matting at different levels, it soon had them queueing up for advice on interior design. Stephenson and Gibney also did café interiors for the DBC as well as the Shelbourne Hotel bar and the Creation Arcade, close to their own office. One of their first really substantial commissions was a small office development in Grafton Street itself, the steel and glass building occupied by the Bank of America. But it was the ESB competition that really made them rich and famous though, at the time, they could scarcely imagine how they were going to spend the staggering £60,000 they would get in fees for designing the board's new headquarters.

Their path was to be made smoother by two separate disasters that would effectively seal the fate of the ESB's houses in Fitzwilliam Street and many more besides. In the early hours of 2 June 1963, two elderly occupants of an old house in Bolton Street were killed when the building collapsed into the street. And just ten days later, in an even more heart-rending tragedy, two little girls on their way to buy sweets were killed when they were buried under tons of rubble in the collapse of two four-storey tenements in Fenian Street. Not surprisingly, there were banner headlines in the newspapers. Women from the area, many of them pushing prams, marched to the City Hall urging the Corporation to 'clear the slums'. But the Fenian Street tragedy was also seized on by apologists for the redevelopment of Dublin whose basic message was that the Georgian city was in a state of virtual collapse and the sooner it was pulled down the better.

This view, largely motivated by self-interest, was most forcefully put by Sam Stephenson himself in the first of many outbursts he would make over the years. In a letter to the *Irish Times*, just two days after the Fenian Street disaster, he argued that Georgian houses were 'never intended to last more than a lifetime'. Laymen would be horrified by the 'shoddiness' of their construction and he said it should be 'clearly understood that they cannot be usefully preserved at all'. In this light, the 'antics' of the preservationists were a 'disservice to Dublin' and he called down a plague – 'bubonic or other approved' – upon them. However, in putting forward

this line of argument, Stephenson and others conveniently ignored the fact that almost any building, no matter how old, will survive as long as it is well-maintained. The ill-fated tenement in Fenian Street was not and that is why it fell down. And in the case of Bolton Street, the house that collapsed had been left without support after two buildings next door were demolished to make way for a petrol station.

Dublin Corporation's reaction to the two collapses was one of sheer panic. Despite the fact that its dangerous buildings inspectors were cleared of any responsibility by a public inquiry, the Corporation immediately launched itself into an orgy of demolition that was to reduce much of the city to ruins. Within days, many old buildings were evacuated and danger notices were posted on the doors. The number of staff in the dangerous buildings inspectorate was increased from less than a dozen to almost one hundred. Beds were moved into the offices so that they could be manned twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. In most cases, the newly-recruited staff were totally unqualified – 'a horde of silent zombies' as *Build* magazine put it – yet they wreaked havoc on the fabric of the city. In the twelve months following the Fenian Street and Bolton Street collapses, they condemned a total of 900 houses (the average in previous years was just 30) and, by early 1965, no less than 2,000 mostly large houses had been condemned, of which over 1,200 were actually demolished. Some surgery was undoubtedly needed on the city's building stock, but this was architectural euthanasia.

'Property owners were suddenly able to de-tenant premises which formerly they could not get tenants out of. Moreover, they could grab the property of others by a simple phone call to the Corporation that they thought a wall or a chimney looked dangerous', according to a lengthy exposé in *Build* magazine. 'People were ordered – sometimes in the middle of the night – to leave their homes for emergency accommodation of the worst kind. Old people, in particular, lived under the threat and dread of eviction. The stress on them was abominable; in many instances, their lives were shortened. This was not taken into account by the Corporation; the sole concern of each inspector was keeping his own slate clean and the devil take the hindmost.'

The Corporation itself often had a vested interest in the demolition of buildings all over the city. If they wanted a particular site for a block of flats, a street-widening scheme or even a surface car park, the softest option was to produce 'evidence' that the buildings on the target site were 'dangerous'. And if the owners were too poor to carry out the extensive repairs demanded by the inspectors then, as *Build* pointed out, 'no power on earth can prevent the house, site and all falling into the hands of the Corporation'. In short, the dangerous buildings code was used by the Corporation as a cheap and easy way to acquire property in the city. And in many cases, this property is as derelict today as it was after the sweaty demolition crews had finished their handiwork twenty years ago.

In fairness, when it came to dealing with the ESB's plans for Fitzwilliam Street, the Corporation did strike a blow for preservation. Acting on the unanimous advice of its entire professional staff, the City Council delighted preservationists by refusing permission for the scheme. The City Architect was Daithi Hanly and, in a well-researched report for the planning department (which was, incidentally, never circulated to city councillors), he made an eloquent plea for the preservation of Fitzwilliam Street. It was part of a magnificent, unbroken Georgian facade built by native Irish craftsmen. 'To break or interrupt this by the intrusion of a modern building, *no matter how good on its own*, would spoil this unique street', he declared. 'It is the inability to see this eighteenth-century townscape around Lower Fitzwilliam Street as a single civic entity directly related to our Irish civilisation that raises any doubt at all about the fate of these sixteen houses'. And then, he posed a question: 'How important is the Book of Kells? At what price and for what convenience would we divide it and allow 16 pages of it to be destroyed?' Hanly's views were predictable. He had been a committee member of the Irish Georgian Society, though he resigned on becoming City Architect in 1959. He left the Corporation in 1965 and, since then, Dublin has – quite deplorably – been without a City Architect.

Thousands of people – including Princess Grace of Monaco – had signed the Old Dublin Society's petition calling for the

preservation of Fitzwilliam Street (it was available in most of the city's larger shops – Brown Thomas, Pims, Arnotts, Clerys and McBirneys) and Eoin 'The Pope' O'Mahony had staged his own singular protest by walking up and down outside the ESB's houses in the company of an Irish wolfhound. There was even talk of broaching the subject with President Kennedy during his triumphant visit here in August 1963. He had expressed concern about plans to destroy historic Lafayette Square in Washington and it was felt that he might have something to say about Fitzwilliam Street, too. If he had, there is no doubt that Sean Lemass would have taken it to heart. For him, Kennedy was almost a saint. As it was, Lemass thought all the opposition to the ESB was 'just a lot of nonsense'. And the board's immediate political master, Erskine Childers, then Minister for Transport and Power, remained totally unmoved by the protests. Meanwhile, the architects had received a telegram from Walter Gropius, German-born guru of the Modern Movement, urging them to stand fast by their principles and not to compromise, whatever happened. There was never any danger of Stephenson and Gibney buckling under pressure. Throughout the controversy, they had the solid support of the ESB's senior officials – notably Larry Barry, the Cork-born chief accountant, who doggedly pursued the board's plans for Fitzwilliam Street to the bitter end.

On 30 September 1964 – the day before the new Planning Act came into force – the Minister for Local Government, Neil Blaney, made an order granting full planning permission for the ESB's office block. The battle for Fitzwilliam Street was over. Ironically, foreign visitors were much more horrified by the result than even the most ardent local preservationists. When the houses were being demolished in the summer of 1965, the president of the Massachusetts Institute of Architects actually wept in Fitzwilliam Street. And a writer in the London *Sunday Times* said that what the ESB was doing beggared description. 'No London vandal has done worse', she declared. As usual, *Build* magazine sounded a warning note. 'If the ESB's victory fires the starting gun for a wholesale onslaught on the remaining splendours of the eighteenth century, then it will be a victory most Pyhrric indeed for the city of Dublin.'

And that is precisely what it turned out to be. With the connivance of the government, speculators were given *carte blanche* to demolish buildings all over the city, regardless of their quality or condition. They were enabled to do so for two reasons. First, a legal provision requiring property owners to obtain permission for the demolition of any habitable house was unaccountably allowed to lapse in 1962, thus removing one essential safeguard. The second, even more important gift from the government to the speculators was the peculiar decision to remove *all* demolition work from planning control. This was done in a most devious manner. The new Planning Act included demolition in its definition of 'development'. But when Neil Blaney brought the Act into force, he made a series of regulations classifying various categories of development as 'exempt'. And buried in the small print of an obscure 22-page statutory instrument was the following very strange sentence: 'Any alteration consisting of the plastering or painting of any external part of any building *or the demolition of any building* . . . shall be exempted development' (emphasis added). Only in the case of buildings listed for preservation would planning permission have to be sought. But since the Corporation didn't publish its first draft development plan for the city until 1967 and this wasn't formally adopted by the City Council until 1971, the speculators had a free hand to do what they liked in the meantime.

They got to work very fast. Almost anyone who had spare cash, notably the self-employed, invested it in property speculation. The gains to be made were enormous and the risks were negligible. Among the early pioneers was Colm McDonnell, a medical doctor practising in Ely Place. He got together with Stock Conversion Trust, a London finance house, to form a joint company called Colmstock Properties and quickly moved into St Stephen's Green, which was still intact at the time. Desmond FitzGerald, who was then professor of architecture in UCD, got there first. His forte was seeking out potential sites for redevelopment, getting planning permissions for office blocks or whatever and then hawking these permissions to likely developers. In 1963, despite the fact that the Corporation could barely decipher his drawings,

he secured approval for an office development at 74-76 St Stephen's Green. Though he was a noted collector of Georgian silver, it didn't seem to concern him this would mean the loss of three elegant Georgian houses, one of them with a figured stucco ceiling depicting the Four Seasons, which had to be salvaged later by the OPW (it is now in Dublin Castle). Colmstock Properties acquired the three houses as well as two more next door and replaced them all with a curtain-walled horror, designed by Professor FitzGerald. And while the five houses were being demolished, the developers were good enough to allow Fianna Fáil to put up a large poster on the site ('Let Lemass Lead On') in time for the 1965 general election. Before the new building was even completed, all 60,000 square feet of it had been let to the Department of Justice for no less than 75 years. On the strength of this valuable letting, Dr McDonnell was able to mortgage the building and raise a low-interest loan of £650,000 from Canada Life to finance developments elsewhere. These included a five-storey block of flats, Finsbury House in Pembroke Road (also designed by FitzGerald) and a block beside the US Embassy which he called 'Colm House'. The name didn't survive a letting to the Bank of Ireland, but the good doctor's widow and heirs are still getting a sizeable rent-roll out of the block, on top of the substantial returns from their half-share in Colmstock House, on the Green.

Right next door, a company called Hainault Investments – controlled by Bernard Fitzpatrick, a wholesale jeweller with a premises off Grafton Street – demolished three more Georgian houses to make way for Dublin's first pre-cast concrete office block. The whole facade, made up of sixty-four window units in a reddish-brown aggregate, was clad in just twelve hours. But while Stephenson Gibney's design blended reasonably well with the Georgian streetscape of the Green, the pre-cast units didn't last. In 1984, only seventeen years after the building was completed, they all had to be replaced with new units – structurally sounder, if not quite as attractive. Back in 1967, however, nobody had any doubts about modern building construction. Charles J. Haughey, then Minister for Finance, performed the official opening ceremony for Citibank's new premises on the ground floor of

Hainault House. 'I for one have never believed that all architectural taste and building excellence ceased automatically with the passing of the eighteenth century', he declared. Less than two years later, Haughey would shell out more than £200,000 to acquire Abbeyville, Kinsealy, one of Co. Dublin's finest eighteenth-century mansions, designed by James Gandon.

In marked contrast to the outcry over Fitzwilliam Street, there was hardly a squeak of protest from the preservation groups over the demolitions in St Stephen's Green. Perhaps, they were exhausted after the protracted struggle with the ESB. In any event, the board's new headquarters was completed in 1970, and most people agreed that it was a fine modern building. It's just a shame that it is in Fitzwilliam Street. Oddly enough, both Sam Stephenson and Arthur Gibney now agree that it was a mistake. Stephenson, always the more pugnacious, concedes that he would do it differently today, while Gibney – by far the more thoughtful of the pair – admits that he agonised for years over the 'moral issues' of what they did in Fitzwilliam Street (it was Arthur, not Sam, who actually designed the front elevation). 'Given my time again, I wouldn't produce a modern building there', he said.

And the ESB? Well, they just went on buying up Georgian houses in the area, most of them even older than the sixteen so wantonly demolished in Fitzwilliam Street. There was even talk of these later acquisitions being demolished, too, this time to be replaced by modern office space masked in a fake Georgian facade. They bought the burned-out shell of the former British Embassy in Merrion Square, destroyed in the Bloody Sunday riots of January 1972, and made a great show of 'restoring it to its original splendour'. And then, when they had bought up four more houses in the same terrace, they got Stephenson to design a huge glass confection of an office block for the back gardens. It didn't wash. In the end, ever-reliable Sam provided them with a gloomy granite-faced extension on East James Street, finished off with a laughable piece of pastiche beside the surviving Georgian terrace on Baggot Street. All in all, the ESB now occupies over a quarter of a million square feet of modern office space

in and around Fitzwilliam Street. It's a long, long way from the drawing-room flat the board first took over in 1927. But how they got from there to here has been a brutal and bloody-minded business.

Three

'You must remember that Ireland is a very backward country and most buildings that are required here can be built by a handyman, his son and a ladder.'

Nothing has so changed the face of cities in the modern age as high-rise buildings. Until well into this century, London was still recognisable as the city rebuilt by Christopher Wren after the Great Fire of 1666, with the dome of St Paul's as the dominant feature of the landscape. Viewed from Waterloo Bridge today, the City looks much the same as Pittsburgh or some equally forgettable middle American town, with a host of tower blocks vying with each other for supremacy of the skyline.

As far back as 1962, Lewis Mumford roundly condemned 'the mass of undistinguished buildings' which had, even then, so disfigured the face of London. 'The present investment in high buildings is primarily a financial phenomenon; architecture is secondary and civic design noticeably absent', he wrote. Mumford might just as easily have been referring to Dublin. For just as London was repeating the worst mistakes of American cities, so we were preparing – as usual – to ape the dismal example set for us by our old masters across the Irish Sea. It fitted the mood of the time, however. There was a feeling that Dublin was somehow emasculated as a city because it didn't have its share of 'skyscrapers'. There was something *macho* about these architectural phallic symbols and we had to have them, if only to show that our capital had grown up at last.

Contemplating the prospect of Liberty Hall and the other tall blocks then under construction, the *Irish Builder* wrote

glowingly about 'progress' and 'the advance of architecture' in Ireland. 'The wind of architectural change has at last reached our shores, and the fight to establish the modern movement has been won'. Architects were now poised 'to improve the standard of the background against which we live, to provide the cheerful and even exciting structures that elevate the spirit and turn the mind towards higher ideals'. Another commentator talked of the erection of 'these clean-lined modern structures' as marking 'the first stage in the transformation of Dublin from a rather shabby town dominated by crumbling slum areas into a twentieth-century city'. Only 'outmoded ideas' were standing in the way of Irish architects doing 'equally well, if not better, than has been done in Caracas, Birmingham or Sydney', he declared. Dublin Corporation could have stopped this movement dead in its tracks, but it lost its nerve when confronted by the clamour for change. Musty Victorian by-laws carefully restricting the height of buildings in the city were cast aside and architects were given free rein to 'express themselves'.

Liberty Hall was the first big breakthrough. A seventeen-storey tower, rising to a height of 197 feet, it was planned to replace the old headquarters of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union at the corner of Eden Quay and Beresford Place. This historic two-storey building, dating from the 1820s, had served the union well since the heady days of Jim Larkin and the 1913 lockout. It had been faithfully restored after suffering massive blast damage during the 1916 rebellion. In 1958, however, it was found to be 'unsafe' and was demolished without any hint of nostalgia. The union then engaged Desmond Rea O'Kelly, a structural engineer, to design a new headquarters incorporating a large conference hall, shops at street level and 35,000 square feet of office space – much of it intended for letting to civil servants or private firms. Given that the amount of office space in the building is relatively small and that the union didn't need all of this space for its own use, there was no practical reason why Liberty Hall had to be so tall. Indeed, the ITGWU's requirements could easily have been accommodated in a five-storey building on the same site. But the union wanted to cut a dash, and the foundation stone for the new building was laid on 12 May 1961 –

the 45th anniversary of James Connolly's execution – with an expression of hope that it would prove 'worthy of past sacrifices'.

Dubliners watched with a mixture of awe and excitement as the reinforced concrete structure rose higher and higher from Eden Quay. When it was finally completed in 1965, commentators fell over each other in their rush for pithy phrases to sum up its virtues. It was described as 'an inspiring monument', 'a crystal tower' and 'a truly contemporary architectural composition'. The *Irish Builder* was swept off its feet. 'Under the changing skies of our climate – at night lighted up, or in the daytime – it always looks handsome; when seen against a blue sky with white clouds sailing over, it has a gossamer quality as charming as a Japanese print scene'. As usual, it took a foreign visitor to bring us back to earth. Writing in the *Architectural Review* in 1966, Ian Nairn described the building as an outrage and said the 'silly flippancy' of the roof was 'a particularly harsh slap in the face for the dome of the Custom House'. But then, we had allowed Gandon's masterpiece to be defaced by the construction, in the 1890s, of the Loop Line railway bridge and then compounded this terrible mistake by permitting the steel lattice-work to be covered with crude advertising hoardings.

Much of the initial infatuation Dubliners had for Liberty Hall can be explained by the fact that, uniquely, it afforded them an unparalleled opportunity to view their city from a great height. High-speed lifts took visitors to an observation terrace on the top floor and this quickly became one of the city's main attractions. But with the outbreak of the Troubles in Northern Ireland, the terrace was closed to the public for security reasons. Then, in December 1972, a bomb went off just outside the building, shattering most of the windows. In the subsequent repair work, the original clear glass gave way to dull reflective glass, and whatever airy, transparent quality Liberty Hall once had has now disappeared. And with the mosaic cladding on the edge beams of each floor visibly peeling off, it has become a decidedly shabby memorial to the tower block mania of the early 1960s. In its current state of near-dilapidation, Liberty Hall would provide an even more appropriate setting for Oisin Kelly's bronze men gazing

skywards in awe and perplexity. This amusing sculpture was originally commissioned by the ITGWU for the pavement outside their headquarters, but an unamused Dublin Corporation refused planning permission on the grounds that it would be 'an obstruction'. And that's why the two larger-than-life figures ended up outisde Cork's County Hall, which had been deliberately designed to beat Liberty Hall in the height stakes – by a matter of inches.

The second of Dublin's motley collection of high-rise office blocks was O'Connell Bridge House. Twelve storeys high and bestriding the bridge like a colossus, this utterly prosaic building (Ian Nairn called it 'weary new City of London') is the principal legacy to the city of John Byrne, the Kerry-born property developer who became one of the richest men in Ireland. Byrne, the eldest of a family of twelve, was born on a small farm near Lixnaw and he first showed his entrepreneurial flair by cutting turf during the Emergency and selling it house-to-house from a donkey cart. Like so many others who would find their way into the property world, he went to London after the war and made his first fortune in the ballroom business. On returning to Ireland, he built up a string of dancehalls, but he was always on the look-out for new opportunities. As a result, he was among the first to appreciate the significance of the 1958 Office Premises Act. It would, as he correctly foresaw, produce a demand in the marketplace for functional, modern office space. Just two months after the new Act came into force in April 1959, Byrne had plans drawn up for a large office block on the site of the Carlisle Building, at the corner of D'Olier Street and Burgh Quay. This building was even grander than the Ballast Office, on the corner of Aston Quay, though both had been designed for the Wide Streets Commissioners in 1800 as part of a unified composition centred on Carlisle (now O'Connell) Bridge. Having served for many years as the offices of Independent Newspapers, the Carlisle Building was put up for auction in August 1957, but withdrawn after bidding stopped at only £26,000. John Byrne bought the property shortly afterwards – purely for its site value – and probably didn't pay much more for it. Indeed,

records show that his site acquisition costs – including the purchase of McDaid's pub next door in 1961 – came to a grand total of just £53,000.

For this astoundingly small sum, Byrne had bought himself one of the most prominent sites in Dublin and he immediately set about maximising its value. That is the main goal of all property developers, but Byrne was the first in Dublin to try, and he was breaking new ground. Obviously, he would need the services of an architect to design the new office building and get it through the planning process. He already had a solicitor in Christopher Gore-Grimes, who had helped to set up his property company, Carlisle Trust Ltd, and Gore-Grimes recommended Desmond FitzGerald, the professor of architecture at UCD. FitzGerald also happened to be Gore-Grimes' brother-in-law.

FitzGerald was impeccably well connected. His father had been Minister for External Affairs in the Cumann na nGaedheal government during the 1920s and his younger brother Garret was making a name for himself as a leading economic commentator through his weekly columns in the *Irish Times*. Desmond, known more commonly as 'Dem' or 'The Prof', had received the RIAI gold medal for the original terminal building at Dublin Airport, a very fine example of early modern architecture, designed in the late 1930s and completed shortly after the end of World War II. Though he was a brilliant mathematician and could be very persuasive on planning minutiae, he affected an image of vagueness as if his head was in the clouds all the time. At UCD, where he had been professor of architecture since 1951, his students found him remote, even disdainful. When the architectural society at the college invited an expert from London to give a lecture on technology, then very much a new-fangled subject, the professor pronounced that technology had little relevance here: 'You must remember that Ireland is a very backward country and most buildings that are required here can be built by a handyman, his son and a ladder.'

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, however, FitzGerald would busy himself designing large, complex structures, mostly for his friend and mentor John Byrne. O'Connell Bridge House, the first venture of this unlikely pair, consumed 500

tons of structural steel, 90 tons of steel-reinforcing bars and no less than 7,500 tons of concrete – not to mention the Portland stone cladding. It cost £1 million, kept more than fifty men at work for two whole years and, in the end, stood 145 feet tall – eleven feet higher than Nelson Pillar. So much for that handyman, his son and ladder.

But the most incredible fact about O'Connell Bridge House is that it was built at all. Although the building contains a total of 45,000 square feet of office space, there is not a single place to park a car. Yet at the time, the Corporation was insisting on the provision of one car parking place for every 500 square feet of office space. On that basis, O'Connell Bridge House should have had ninety car places. Instead, it had none. FitzGerald told the planners, who bitterly opposed the scheme, that it would be 'quite impracticable' to provide any car parking accommodation on the site. Despite this, the Corporation waived its sacrosanct car parking standards as well as the more fluid height restriction by-laws and granted permission for the scheme. It is difficult to explain this strange turn of events other than that it came about by political influence.

John Byrne's close relationship with Fianna Fáil politicians was well known. Notable among these was Charles J. Haughey, who gained his first cabinet post as Minister for Justice in 1961. Haughey had married the daughter of Sean Lemass; he was a chartered accountant by profession, in which career he had been immensely successful prior to his entry to the political field. Along with Harry Boland, who would later become secretary of Taca, the notorious Fianna Fáil fund-raising group, he established the firm of Haughey Boland and Company, with offices at 61 Amiens Street. Many new companies set up during the Lemass boom thought it worthwhile to hire Haughey Boland and Co. as their accountants, and throughout the past two decades, the firm has looked after the affairs of a staggering number of companies, many of them in the property field.

But Haughey's links with John Byrne may go much deeper. Byrne's principal property vehicles are Carlisle Trust and Dublin City Estates. One of Haughey's former accountancy partners, Des Traynor – now deputy chairman of merchant

bankers Guinness and Mahon – has long been a director of both companies. Traynor is one of the closest members of Haughey's tight inner circle of business friends and he is also Haughey's financial adviser. Byrne's property empire is controlled through an off-shore company, the Guinness and Mahon Cayman Trust, in the British West Indies tax haven of the Cayman Islands, where the relevant documentation on its ownership is not available for public inspection. There have been persistent allegations that Haughey is a sleeping partner, though there is one limited disclaimer on the record. In 1983, at the height of the controversy about the 'Endcamp scheme' – Byrne's plans to build over 2,000 houses in the green belt area between Baldoyle and Portmarnock – his solicitors took the unprecedented step of issuing a statement to the media denying that Haughey was involved. He 'has not and has never had any direct or indirect interest, whether beneficial or otherwise, in Endcamp Ltd', Gore and Grimes declared. During the public inquiry into the scheme in January 1984, several local residents marched up and down outside Liberty Hall. One child had a message for John Byrne. She was carrying a placard which read, 'Go and build your houses in the Cayman Islands!'

The fact that Byrne has never had much problem in finding state tenants for his office blocks seems to bear out his strong political connections with Fianna Fáil. In July 1964, five months before O'Connell Bridge House was completed, it was revealed that the Office of Public Works had agreed to lease all the office space in the building for four different government departments. The lease was for a period of thirty-five years at a rent of just over £1 per square foot subject, of course, to seven-year reviews. The political boss of the OPW at the time was Donogh O'Malley, who is fondly remembered as Ireland's most flamboyant Minister for Education. However, what is often forgotten is the fact that, for five years in the early 1960s, he served his time as Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance with responsibility for the OPW. Thus, he played a pivotal role in deciding whether the state should rent office space in the new blocks then under construction.

As a true acolyte of the Lemass boom, O'Malley saw it as

his function to encourage property development, if only because it meant instant jobs for construction workers. He soon found himself at the centre of a charmed circle of young men on the make, usually in the Russell Hotel restaurant, and several deals were done at his table. He put architects in touch with developers and generally kept things moving at a fast and furious pace. But his most critical contribution to the fortunes of the property developers was the decision to lease many of their new office blocks to provide bright, modern workplaces for the state's growing army of civil servants. For the developers, this removed much of the risk element in what they were doing by virtually guaranteeing a stable supply of 'blue chip' tenants.

To Michael Quinn, *Build* magazine's acerbic commentator, this smacked of scandal. In 1965, he wrote, 'The government appears to have surrendered itself completely to a policy of indulging the civil service. Gone are the days when they would be satisfied with a Georgian drawingroom and a turf fire in Merrion Street. It's squandermania, of course, but don't ask me where they are all coming from. We have the bureaucracy of an empire in the confines of three provinces.'

But the state was hooked and, over the next twenty years, it would gobble up almost three-quarters of all the speculative office space built in the Dublin area. This addiction to renting office blocks, rather than building its own or refurbishing its older property, meant that successive governments and semi-state companies would virtually underwrite the entire market for speculative office space in the city. And the first fatal 'fix' was administered by the revered Donogh O'Malley.

Meanwhile, John Byrne and Desmond FitzGerald were so encouraged by their success with O'Connell Bridge House that, before it was even finished, they submitted plans to the Corporation for an exact replica – in mirror image – on the site of the Ballast Office, then the princely headquarters of the Dublin Port and Docks Board. Instead of just one colossus mounting guard on O'Connell Bridge, there were to be two. This time, however, Byrne's political muscle was to fail him, and planning permission was refused for what was seen as a thoroughly arrogant scheme. (In 1973, the port board sold the Ballast Office to Royal Liver Insurance for £¼ million.

It was demolished in 1979 and replaced by a poor enough replica of itself, executed by Niall Scott, Michael Scott's son. Now called Ballast House, it has an assortment of unsympathetic shopfronts at ground-floor level while the 15,000 square feet of offices on the upper floors remained substantially vacant for almost four years after the building was completed.

When O'Connell Bridge House first opened in January 1965, it had a roof restaurant with splendid views over the city. Sadly, the restaurant closed down in July 1966 and Byrne converted the space it occupied into an office for himself. The huge Guinness sign on the front lasted much longer and, at one stage, it was generating almost as much in rent as all the office space in the building; perhaps that is why Uncle Arthur recently yielded this prime advertising site to Sony of Japan. Certainly, Byrne never missed a trick when it came to the business of making money. In 1963, he got planning permission on appeal from Neil Blaney for a large block of luxury flats (also designed by FitzGerald) at St Ann's, a substantial house on its own grounds at the junction of Ailesbury Road and Anglesea Road, in Donnybrook. But since 1965, there has been a continuing wrangle with the Corporation over an illegal extension on the roof.

In 1968, Byrne demolished two more old buildings on D'Olier Street to make way for a 20,000 square feet extension to O'Connell Bridge House. And in the same year, he paid £211,000 to the liquidator of T. and C. Martin, the long-established builders' providers, to acquire their old premises at 21-24 D'Olier Street. On the site, four years later, FitzGerald provided him with another utilitarian office block, D'Olier House, which was also leased *in toto* by the state. Thus, the art deco headquarters of the Dublin Gas Company is now sandwiched between two FitzGerald-designed office blocks. Apart from one very strange case which is dealt with later, the only office block Byrne had any difficulty letting to the state was yet another FitzGerald production on the site of a coal yard in Townsend Street, beside the railway bridge. This ghastly building remained vacant for a full fifteen months before it was finally let to the Department of Social Welfare.

Sir Thomas Bennett, KBE, was even older than FitzGerald

is now when he designed Hawkins House in 1962. Senior partner in the London firm of T. P. Bennett and Son, his design work spanned the entire spectrum of architectural endeavour in post-war Britain – temporary housing, 'new town' planning, tower blocks of flats, big department stores and, of course, offices, with the enormous headquarters of New Scotland Yard as his major memorial. At the ripe old age of 75, this veteran was hired by the Rank Organisation to design the huge office development they were planning for the site of the Theatre Royal. The *Irish Builder* found the news reassuring and commented that Bennett would find great scope to demonstrate his 'genius in the manipulation of such complex and varied elements as this unit will comprise'. If the beloved Theatre Royal was to be replaced, at least there was some hope that an experienced English architect might prove 'a very good tutor for our native office designers', who were then very much feeling their way in the dark.

Everybody in Dublin over the age of thirty remembers the Theatre Royal; it is part of the folk memory of the city. Modelled on Radio City Music Hall in New York's Rockefeller Centre, which is now a thriving historic monument, the Royal was a huge art deco-style building with a vast auditorium decorated in the Moorish manner. Like Radio City, it was a 'cine-variety' theatre, with movies and a stage show in a unique double-bill. And while its New York counterpart had a troupe of leggy dancers called the Rockettes, the Royal had the equally leggy Royalettes as well as Tommy Dando on the Compton organ that used to rise magically out of the floor, all lit up, with Dando already at the key-board. Other Royal favourites included Eddie Byrne and his 'Double Your Money' quiz, Jimmy O'Dea, Josef Locke, Mickser Reid, Peggy Dell and Noel Purcell as well as visiting stars like Danny Kaye, Vic Oliver and Gracie Fields. But for us, as kids, the greatest treat was to be allowed to run up to the very back row of the Grand Circle, from where the stage seemed as small as a television screen.

In March 1962, the Rank Organisation – masquerading as Irish Cinemas Ltd – announced that the Theatre Royal and the adjoining Regal Cinema were to close down. People said

that television had killed them off, but this couldn't have been true, as Telefis Eireann was then just fifteen months old. Cecil Sheridan, one of the Royal's old troupers, was not conned by this nonsense. He saw all too clearly why J. Arthur Rank was planning to destroy Dublin's last great variety theatre. Interviewed in his dressing-room on the night of the last show on 30 June 1962, he said, 'It's not television that's done it, you know. It's a matter of how much money you can make out of a square foot of property.'

The Royal got an emotional send-off. As Rank's auctioneers were preparing to sell off the theatre's fittings, even its ticket kiosks and safety curtain, ordinary Dubliners filled every one of its 2,500 seats for the last time. The 'Royal Finale' featured a host of stars associated with the theatre since it first opened in 1935. Jimmy Campbell and his Orchestra played 'There's No Business Like Show Business' towards the end and the huge audience joined the cast in singing 'Auld Lang Syne'. There were half-a-dozen curtain calls, a little rock 'n roll in Hawkins Street as crowds filed out and tears at the staff party afterwards. Within a matter of weeks, everyone knew the demolition men would be on the job. If only the Royal had survived for a few more years, it would have made a most splendid venue for rock concerts. . . .

But the grisly business of maximising the site value got under way almost immediately and, by November 1962, the Royal and Regal had been obliterated. Rank had already got planning permission for a massive office development on the site; after giving way to John Byrne over O'Connell Bridge House, the Corporation was hardly in a position to refuse, no matter how appalling the design produced by Sir Thomas Bennett. And it really was appalling. With 122,000 square feet of office space encased in a formless twelve-storey slab block and a curtain-walled biscuit tin on each side, Hawkins House is easily the most monstrous pile of architectural rubbish ever built in Dublin. Not surprisingly, when faced with the finished product, those who had held out such high hopes for Bennett were sheepishly silent. For not only was the building a horror in itself, it also ruined several vistas – notably the view of Trinity College from the top of Dawson Street. Along with O'Connell Bridge House, it led to a re-examination of the

whole question of height in the city. Thus, in February 1965, the Corporation announced that it would permit further high buildings only in 'exceptional circumstances'. Things had been getting out of hand, with a proliferation of proposals for 18-storey tower blocks in places like Grafton Street and Merrion Row. But the planners had belatedly discovered a new weapon to combat this craze – the 'plot ratio'. In future, the sky would no longer be the limit. Instead, a plot ratio of 2½-1 would apply throughout the city. This meant that if a site had an area of 4,000 square feet, the maximum amount of office space which could be built on it would not be allowed to exceed 10,000 square feet.

However, this didn't prevent Rank expanding their office empire into Townsend Street where, along with the New Metropole cinema, they built College House, a loathsome eight-storey block designed – if that's the right word – by Bennett in collaboration with Dublin architects Henry J. Lyons and Partners. This block, along with Hawkins House, was sold in October 1984 as part of a major deal between Rank and British Land, one of the largest property investment companies in the UK. The two blocks netted Rank almost £12 million, a very high price indeed for such architectural scrap. Why? Because most of the office space is leased to the state, which can always be counted on to pay the rent.

Another dreadful development that slipped through the net was Apollo House, in Tara Street, on the other side of Hawkins House. This vulgar pre-cast concrete block, with its street-level showrooms, car park and petrol station, occupies the site of seven old buildings, cruelly breaking the continuity of the streetscape. Nine storeys high and almost full of civil servants, it was developed for Norwich Union in the late 1960s by a British company called B.O.S. (Block Office and Shop) Investments and the architects included David Keane, who has recently been at the centre of the controversy over Irish Life's plans for nearby George's Quay. Keane, a brother of Judge Ronan Keane, was also the architect for another dreary landmark, the 100-ft high Phibsboro' Tower, with its attendant retinue of single-storey shops covered by a large open car park. Also in pre-cast concrete and quite similar in style to Apollo House, this development by Canadian

millionaire Galen Weston replaced a harmless terrace of eighteen cottages, mostly occupied by elderly tenants, who were given their marching orders after the freehold titles had been bought out over their heads.

B.O.S. Investments first cropped up as one of the groups of faceless speculators who would prey on the Gaiety Theatre over the years. In the summer of 1965, during a lengthy national newspaper strike, they put a small advertisement in *Business and Finance* indicating that they were applying for planning permission for a mammoth office development on the Gaiety site. Amid widespread protests, the Corporation rejected the scheme – but merely on the grounds that it would lead to traffic congestion in the area. However, in February 1967 – under pressure from the Arts Council, Actors' Equity and conservation interests – the City Council passed a resolution declaring that both the Gaiety and Olympia theatres must be preserved as places of social and cultural amenity for the people of Dublin. Eamonn Andrews Productions then secured a lease on the South King Street theatre, and Andrews himself pledged that the Gaiety 'is here to stay'.

Sixteen years later, after the Andrews organisation had failed to keep the building in good repair, they were served with a 'schedule of dilapidations' and ordered to surrender their lease. It transpired that the Gaiety's landlord was Joe Murphy, an Irish-born building contractor and millionaire recluse, who had unwittingly bought the theatre in 1968 as part of a parcel of property extending back to Chatham Street. There were deep suspicions about his intentions but, when the Gaiety closed in January 1984, it turned out to be a temporary measure: Murphy's organisation spent over £750,000 on a thorough restoration and the theatre re-opened with joy unconfined just nine months later. But Murphy had not become a sentimental old fool and he hoped to make a profit on the project. He had already made a tidy sum by selling off the adjoining site – with planning permission for offices, flats and shops – to London and Leeds, the property arm of the Ladbroke group. In July 1984, they sold the completed office block to Telecom Eireann for £7 million, and it is a safe bet that Ladbroke's made as much as £2 million on the deal.

Inevitably, the Olympia Theatre also became a target for speculation. In 1974, it was bought for £70,000 by a London-Irish firm of ballroom proprietors, controlled by Tom O'Gorman and the Gallen brothers. They wanted to turn the theatre into a ballroom, but this was rejected by Dublin Corporation. Trading as Olympia Theatre Ltd, with registered offices at Haughey Boland and Co, they sought planning permission in 1970 to demolish the theatre, which was already leased to Brendan Smith's Olympia Productions Ltd. Despite the City Council's 1967 resolution calling for the preservation of the theatre, the owners wanted to replace it with an office block, a multi-storey car park and a much smaller new theatre. The scheme was drawn up by Cork architect Brian Wain and the required planning notice was inserted only in the Cork *Evening Echo*. This was rightly characterised by *Plan* magazine as a 'backroom attempt to demolish the Olympia' to make way for a 'manifestly speculative scheme'.

The Corporation again refused permission, citing eight different reasons, none of which, curiously enough, made any reference to the need to preserve the existing building. But what really saved the Olympia, ironically, was the dramatic collapse of its proscenium arch during rehearsals for a loud musical on 5 November 1974. A major campaign was launched to raise funds for the restoration of the theatre and the Corporation itself contributed a 'loan' of £100,000, which it still faintly hopes will be repaid. The Olympia re-opened in March 1977 and, though its fortunes since then have been somewhat mixed, at least it is still there.

The old Queen's Theatre in Pearse Street was not so lucky, however. Founded in 1829 and much-altered over the years, it was arguably Ireland's first 'national theatre', staging patriotic plays which often incurred the wrath of Dublin Castle. Jimmy O'Dea and Harry O'Donovan first got together at the Queen's in 1928 and, for many years, it was the home of the Happy Gang. For the last fifteen years of its life, the rather dingy old playhouse served as a 'temporary' base for the Abbey company until their new theatre in Abbey Street opened in July 1966. Two months later, Lisney's put the lease of the Queen's on the market for just £25,000. Trinity College were the ground landlords and they wanted to acquire

the building, but the Department of Education refused to advance the piddling sum they needed. Instead, the theatre was snapped up by Hubert McNally, who had interests in the cinema business. It soon became clear, however, that he was determined to get rid of it. After getting outline planning permission for an office block, he sold out to solicitor Gerry Hickey, one-time legal partner of George Colley and a leading member of Fianna Fáil's fund-raising committee until Charles J. Haughey came to power. Hickey, who dabbled in property development throughout the 1970s, brought in New Ireland Assurance and, through a company called Pearse Estates, they demolished the Queen's Theatre and built an office block on the site. Five storeys high, with a bricked-in car park at street level, Aras an Phiarsaigh (as it's called) was designed by W. M. O'Dwyer and Associates and it must surely rate as one of Dublin's most ugly modern buildings – though the Corporation is entirely to blame for the fact that it is set at an angle to the street; the demented road engineers have plans to sweep away the entire south side of Pearse Street. Now part of Friends Provident's extensive property portfolio, the block has been occupied by the Revenue Commissioners since it was finished in 1971. At the time, *Plan* mourned the loss of the old Queen's and the tenth-rate quality of what replaced it. 'Private greed has always been given precedence in Dublin, especially in these last ten years of the Faith and Fatherland Party', it said.

Meanwhile, serious questions had been raised when the new Abbey Theatre was completed in 1966. Contrary to popular myth, the old Abbey was not 'destroyed by fire' in July 1951. Though damaged by the blaze, the building continued to be used for meetings of the Irish Academy of Letters until its demolition in 1960. 'It would have been better to have reconstructed the old rather than build a new theatre', said the *Irish Builder* in an editorial. 'The Abbey has won for itself a worldwide reputation and . . . we feel that the tourists who come here would prefer to see the old Abbey, the Abbey of Yeats and Synge, rather than the Abbey of Scott'.

As far back as 1959, however, Michael Scott and Partners had prepared their plans for a new theatre on the Abbey site. The cost was originally estimated at £235,000, but seven

years and six hundred drawings later, the figure had shot up to £725,000 and the Dáil Committee of Public Accounts was calling for a 'thorough investigation' of the matter. It appears that little, if any, consideration was given to the possibility of restoring the historic old building, though this would have been much cheaper. In the end, the Abbey got a very dated modern theatre in a blank-walled building which some felt looked like a huge public convenience. The new Abbey had seating for only one hundred more people than the old, and one is left with the question: was it all really worth it?

Four

'Architects are not artists; we manipulate other people's money and reach some sort of balance of all the conflicting priorities. At least I have the intention of making buildings you don't really notice. I would say, in fact, that the best building is the one you notice least.'

Ballsbridge used to be a very attractive area. Largely developed in the last century by the Pembroke Estate, with fine red-brick houses on wide tree-lined roads, it was a masterpiece of Victorian planning. Always fashionable and self-assured, the area never suffered the steady decline experienced in other parts of Dublin. Its building stock was very well maintained, most of the houses were owner-occupied and there was a ready market for residential property in the district long before it became part of 'Dublin 4'. In short, if there was one area of the city that didn't need a strong dose of 'urban renewal', this was it.

Today, however, Ballsbridge is infested with office blocks and many of the houses that survived the demolition squads have been converted to office use, mainly by professional firms and embassies anxious to acquire a 'prestigious' address. Over the past twenty years, Ballsbridge has become what estate agents call a 'prime office location', commanding rental levels far higher than other parts of the city. It is no wonder, then, that almost 1.5 million square feet of modern office space, dispersed through no less than thirty-five different buildings, has been installed in a fairly narrow land corridor between the Royal Dublin Society showgrounds and the Grand Canal. In the process, however, the developers have only succeeded in destroying much of the amenity value that attracted them to Ballsbridge in the first place.

The ball was set rolling by the United States government in 1956 when it purchased a substantial Victorian house on the corner of Elgin Road and Pembroke Road as the site for a new embassy building. The house, which had served as Bord Fáilte's first headquarters, was demolished three years later to make way for a very striking circular building, in concrete and glass, designed by New York architect John MacL. Johansen and opened in 1964. With typical American modesty, Ambassador Grant Stockdale proclaimed it as 'the showpiece of Europe' and because of its singular shape it gained instant currency among Dubliners as the 'Wall of Death'. The more aesthetic saw in the new embassy echoes of Martello towers and the curving facade of the Bank of Ireland in College Green of even the pattern of an Aran sweater. But while the doughnut-like layout of the interior has always presented confusing orientation problems (perhaps reflecting American foreign policy?), the building must be counted among the best examples of modern architecture in Dublin.

One of the reasons the U.S. Embassy fits in so well is that it is only three-and-a-half storeys high, like most of the Victorian buildings in the vicinity. However, the scale of Ballsbridge would soon be pushed dramatically skywards by the Intercontinental (now Jury's) Hotel. This project was conceived in 1960 at a time when Bord Fáilte estimated that 1,500 first-class hotel bedrooms would be needed to cater for the anticipated upsurge in American tourists. With the board's active involvement, a consortium was formed by Aer Rianta, the Gresham Hotel company and the Pan Am-owned Intercontinental Hotels Corporation to build an ultra-modern 315-bedroom hotel right in the heart of Ballsbridge. The site, at the junction of Pembroke Road and Lansdowne Road, had been part of Trinity College's botanic gardens, and the foundation stone for the new hotel was laid in October 1961. Designed by W. B. Tabler, a leading American hotel architect, with Michael Scott as consultant, the Intercontinental was the largest hotel yet built in Ireland.

However, the fact that it was nine storeys high set a nasty precedent that was immediately seized upon by other developers. Thus, in November 1961, a London property firm called Albion (perfidious Albion!) Securities sought permission

for a twelve-storey block of luxury flats overlooking nearby Herbert Park. There was nothing unusual in that; Irish Life had plans in the mid-1950s to build *six* twelve-storey blocks of flats at Simmonscourt, but the scheme had to be abandoned. after the government forced the company 'in the national interest' to cede the land to the RDS. Albion Securities were on much firmer ground, however. The company had bought up the rear garden of an Anglican convent on Clyde Road and their path to a huge speculative gain was cleared by Neil Blaney, Minister for Local Government, when he over-ruled Dublin Corporation and granted permission for the scheme in 1963. A year later, Albion Securities had no problem in persuading Jack Lynch, then Minister for Industry and Commerce, to turn the first sod for their back-lane block of flats. What neither Blaney nor Lynch seemed to realise is that this enormous block represents a massive intrusion into the leafy, low-rise steetscape of the Pembroke Estate. Not only that. Like the London Hilton towering over Hyde Park, Ardoyne House with its winged penthouses blatantly cashes in on a priceless public amentity, Herbert Park. The panoramic view from the flats in the building may be unparalleled but, for those who use the park, its dominating presence could not be more oppressive.

Like the U.S. Embassy and the 'Intercon', as it was called, Ardoyne House was built by Crampton's, who seem to have been the contractors for virtually every new building in the Ballsbridge area. This well-respected firm, which celebrated its centenary in 1979, was based for over seventy years at the Hammersmith Works, occupying a site of almost one acre on Pembroke Road, just beside the new hotel. The works, with its classical arched entrance, had previously been the headquarters of Richard Turner, the great Victorian glasshouse-builder, whose masterpieces include the Curvilinear Range at the National Botanic Gardens in Glasnevin. In 1963, Crampton's decided that they no longer needed such a large site and built a rather nondescript modern four-storey headquarters around the corner in Shelbourne Road. However, before moving out of the Hammersmith Works, they greatly enhanced its site value by getting permission for a large office development there. With this in the bag, they sold the site in

1964 to a London-based property development company, Hume Holdings, whose managing director greatly impressed the natives by driving round the country in a (rented) Rolls Royce. Apparently, this Kiplingesque character thought he was still in the colonies.

Hume House was named after its developers and Jack Lynch, by then Minister for Finance, performed the opening ceremony in February 1966. Built in just fourteen months by Crampton's (naturally) to a design by Lardner and Partners, its seven floors of offices were originally supported on stilts and the reinforced concrete structure was left exposed, with brick infill panels under steel windows. Massively disruptive of the streetscape, its high gable wall plonked on Pembroke Road, the block was given a welcome facelift by Irish Life in 1983, though the company got away with adding on another 5,500 square feet of office space by filling in the ground floor. Hume Holdings had sold the block to Irish Life in 1971 for about £1 million – a cosy deal between two companies who had been bedfellows in a number of developments in Dublin and Cork during the 1960s. But Hume House is also an interesting illustration of Dublin Corporation's vested interest in office blocks; its rateable valuation is £6,363, compared to only £375 for the Hammersmith Works, which it replaced. Thus in 1984, when the city rate was £18.71 to the pound, it produced almost £120,000 for the Corporation's coffers – though, needless to say, this burden fell on the tenants, not on Irish Life.

The next move in transforming Ballsbridge into an 'office mecca' was made by Stephen O'Flaherty, the uncrowned king of the Irish motor trade. Just after the end of World War II, when the Allies were dividing the spoils of a defeated Germany, O'Flaherty shrewdly picked up the Volkswagen distributorship for Ireland and Britain (the British motor dealers had turned it down, foolishly believing that nobody would buy 'those Nazi cars'). A few years later, 'Stepho', as he was commonly known, sold off the VW franchise for Britain at a huge profit, though he built up his own empire at home by taking on Mercedes, Mazda and several other marques. By 1980, when several of his companies went into voluntary liquidation as part of a re-organisation of the Motor

Distributors group, a massive surplus of over £7 million was realised. No wonder Stepho was able to build a vast modern 'stately home' at Stepaside, which would comfortably seat one hundred guests for lunch, as well as maintain a luxurious villa in Marbella and a socialite wife, the glittering Tina O'Flaherty. But before moving to the foothills of the Dublin Mountains, Ireland's VW czar scored a major coup by getting planning permission in 1963 for a nine-storey block of offices on the site of his former home at the corner of Lansdowne Road and Northumberland Road, right opposite the newly-completed Intercontinental Hotel. The Corporation had rejected this blatantly speculative scheme, but O'Flaherty had friends in high places – and one of those friends was Sean Lemass himself. Thus, before Neil Blaney had even made the order granting permission on appeal, Stepho threw a champagne party to celebrate his famous victory. Lemass had promised to 'fix him up'. Blaney's decision was made against the strong advice of his own planning officials. Stepho lost no time in seeking out a purchaser for his now very valuable asset.

This brought him to Mont Kavanagh, the managing director of Hardwicke Ltd, Ireland's oldest and most-respected property investment company. Kavanagh was a refined, urbane man with a very subtle mind – unusual for someone who had made most of his early money in the hide and skin trade, a vocation he shared with his partner, Norman Judd. But Mont made no bones about it and even listed his profession as 'fellmonger' in Hardwicke's annual returns to the Companies Office, though he had served as a Guards officer in a tank regiment during the war. Like John Byrne, Kavanagh saw that the way to make money in the Ireland of the 1960s was by building office blocks, and that's why he was interested in Stephen O'Flaherty's proposition. He hired Norman Bowie, a most astute chartered surveyor and partner in Jones Lang Wooton, to negotiate with O'Flaherty on his behalf. Finally, in mid-1964, a deal was done in Stepho's London flat and Hardwicke agreed to pay the then staggering sum of £100,000 to acquire the O'Flaherty home as well as some adjoining property. (This was not the only deal between the two parties. One of O'Flaherty's companies owned McKenzie's shop in

Pearse Street and when the splendid Victorian building was destroyed by fire in April 1970, Hardwicke bought the burned-out shell for over £200,000. A pre-cast concrete office block called Oisin House was built on the site and, of course, it was rented by the state.)

For the Lansdowne Road project, Hardwicke brought in Irish Life and, together, they set up a company called simply Lansdowne Ltd to carry out the development as a joint venture. Norman Bowie had imported Fitzroy Robinson, a London architect with whom he had worked closely on a number of office schemes, to act as consultant, but Kavanagh insisted on having his own architect to design the proposed office block. Brian Hogan, who was destined to do practically all of Hardwicke's later work in Dublin, had wisely caught a plane home from Kuwait after learning of the death of Alan Hope, who had been Hardwicke's main architect. He was called in for a meeting with Mont Kavanagh, they got on well and he was given the job. The fact that his father, career civil servant Sarsfield Hogan, had just become chairman of Irish Life presumably had nothing whatever to do with young Brian's extraordinary success. Around the same time, coincidentally, Hogan designed what is still one of his better schemes – a two-storey block of flats at Simmonscourt Castle – and again the client was Irish Life. Otherwise, most of his work is exceptionally bland. 'Architects are not artists; we manipulate other people's money and reach some sort of balance of all the conflicting priorities', he once said, summing up his philosophy. 'At least I have the intention of making buildings you don't really notice. I would say, in fact, that the best building is the one you notice least.' Lansdowne House is emphatically not in the wallpaper category. Nine storeys of exposed grey-white aggregate, 102 feet high, could hardly be made to fit into any background, least of all the Victorian red-brick of Ballsbridge. Though cleverly detailed, it still screams out for attention, and that was even more apparent in November 1967 when Charles J. Haughey, then Minister for Finance, officiated at the opening ceremony. All 880 of the pre-cast concrete units that went to make the building had been moulded on site by Crampton's and, long before the last one was slotted into place, the entire block had been

profitably let to Allied Irish Banks as their first headquarters. But for Brian Hogan, the most important thing about Lansdowne House was that it gave him the opportunity of working closely with Fitzroy Robinson, a real 'developer's architect' and master of the nitty-gritty of modern office design. He knew everything about how to extract the maximum amount of lettable space out of a building by making the service core more compact and the lobbies and circulation areas less expansive. 'I learned more from Fitzroy in six months than I could have learned in a life-time', Hogan said later. And that's probably why he became one of the most successful office architects in Dublin.

However, at least Lansdowne House is a thoughtful work of architecture, unlike Carrisbrook House, just across the road. This eight-storey building despite its unique hexagonal shape, succeeds in being unutterably dreary – mainly because its architects, the old (Protestant) firm of McDonnell and Dixon, chose concrete and brick rather than steel and glass. Developed by a London-based trust company called Hamilton Stubber, it required the demolition of a large Victorian residence on the corner of Northumberland Road as well as the last house in the late-Georgian terrace on Pembroke Road. The same developers and architects were responsible for an equally dreadful elongated office block at the rear of 52 St Stephen's Green, owned by the Church of Ireland Representative Body, which inexcusably juts out beyond the established building line on Ely Place where, ironically, McDonnell and Dixon have their own offices. Regardless of their poor architectural quality, both this block and Carrisbrook House were leased by different branches of the state bureaucracy as soon as they were ready for occupation. By contrast, the three-storey block rented by Texaco on the west side of Pembroke Road is a distinctive example of modern architecture. Designed by David Keane and Partners for another cross-channel developer, the David Lewis group, its dark tinted windows encased in an outer shell of large pre-cast concrete units make for what one critic called 'the wittiest corner turning in Dublin'.

Meanwhile, Mont Kavanagh was marching on and the next target of this former tank commander was Burlington Road,

one of the finest residential enclaves in the city. However, the fate of its majestic Victorian detached houses had been sealed in 1964 when one of them, No. 8, was purchased by the state-backed Agricultural Credit Corporation for about £23,000. The ACC immediately drew up plans for a new headquarters on the site and, though this scheme was bitterly opposed by Dublin Corporation, Neil Blaney saw fit to grant permission on appeal. Then, in November 1965, the Fianna Fáil members of the City Council trooped along in force to a special meeting and voted to rezone the area from residential to office use. Burlington Road was doomed, though even these councillors could scarcely have foreseen the wholesale destruction that would soon follow their misguided decision.

The imminent threat to Burlington Road was graphically illustrated in 1965 by the completion of a large six-storey office block at the junction with Mespil Road. This had been the site of St Margaret's Hall boarding school for girls until 1962, when it was acquired by a company rather baldly called Dublin Investments Ltd. It was the vehicle of an English-born property developer who rejoiced in the name of Augustus Kennedy Kisch. A barrister who served in the Royal Navy during the war and went on to specialise in property and planning law, Kisch came from a wealthy London family with extensive property interests of its own. Having married an Irish woman in 1943, he eventually decided to settle in Co. Wicklow around 1960 and soon got involved in the burgeoning property boom. One of his fellow-directors in Dublin Investments was solicitor Alexis FitzGerald, the long-serving Fine Gael senator and confidant of his namesake Garret. So when it came to appointing an architect for the Mespil Road office block, it was only natural that FitzGerald would recommend his brother-in-law, John Costello, the son of former Taoiseach John A. Costello and brother of Judge Declan Costello. It was a fortuitous choice because Kennedy Kisch later threw in his lot with the British-based Metropolitan Estates and Property Corporation and became the boss man of MEPC (Ireland) Ltd, which he ran as a personal fiefdom. Thus, John Costello and his future partners, Padraig Murray and Piaras Beaumont, got the lucrative commissions for all of MEPC's developments here

over a period of more than two decades. These included Ireland's first shopping centre at Stillorgan (1965), the much larger Dun Laoghaire shopping centre (1976) and a variety of big office schemes in and around the city centre.

As a decent and conscientious architect, Costello became disturbed by the morality of doing new office developments in sensitive areas of the city. More and more, he turned his attention to painstaking restoration projects, of which the most significant was his work on the Royal Hospital at Kilmainham. In fact, he first established his reputation in this field with the restoration of a truly magnificent Georgian town house in South Leinster Street, which would have been demolished if his original plans for MEPC had succeeded. *Build* described the scheme for an office block on the site as 'open-mouthed butchery' and complained that nobody seemed to care. 'Perhaps it all seems logical to tear down the worthwhile parts of Dublin, leaving the other seven-eights as a visual and odorous slum.' However, under strong pressure from preservation groups, Kennedy Kisch was persuaded to refurbish the threatened building, with its stunning rococo plasterwork, and it now proudly serves as the headquarters of Tegral, with MEPC's office block confined to the adjoining site.

Davitt House on Mespil Road was John Costello's first major project and, unfortunately, it shows. Among the ugliest of Dublin's modern buildings, it was found to be shedding some of its materials less than twenty years later. Shortly after the block was first completed, the *Irish Builder* gave it a scathing review. 'As modern architecture, this building has little merit. It is an unimaginative example of the worst features of eclectic work of the Thirties. It uses more materials than are necessary, and mixes them badly – copper, coloured cement bricks of different tones, aluminium, exposed concrete, white glass infill panels and slate facing – and the copper is put to the oddest use in the city, to face the Mansard roof'. (The same critic was also very dubious about Costello's eccentric design for Craig Gardner's office block on Pembroke Road completed in 1968. But at least in this case, the contractors undertook a careful demolition of the pair of Victorian houses that stood on the site and

salvaged their more important features.) However, before Davitt House was even finished in 1965, the state had agreed to lease the entire building as a headquarters for the new Department of Labour. And when it was revealed that the Office of Public Works was spending the then enormous sum of £80,000 on furnishings and fittings, James Dillon, the former Fine Gael leader, exclaimed that it was 'the daftest thing I ever heard of' to spend so much on a rented building. Obviously, he didn't realise that his own party colleague, Alexis FitzGerald, had been involved in the development or that it is merely normal practice for office developers to leave the often substantial burden of fitting-out costs to their luckless tenants.

The erection of Davitt House put the squeeze on Burlington Road, and its early Victorian mansions were soon to be caught in a pincer movement. Early in 1965, the cross-channel St Martin's Property Company bought up a parcel of buildings at the corner of Waterloo Road and Upper Baggot Street and imported the M.W. Design Partnership to design a massive office block for the site. M.W. Design was a 'plan factory' operating from Hale, in Cheshire, and only one of its three senior partners was a qualified architect. Under the guidance of Irish-born Robert Morton, who later became a well-known operator in the property world, the firm picked up a string of major commissions for office blocks in Dublin during the late 1960s. Its success was attributed by Irish-based architects to a deliberate policy of undercutting the RIAI's prescribed scale of fees and offering property developers a complete package deal. One of the key features of the buildings churned out by M.W. Design was their cheapness. Indeed, St Martin's House – a huge curtain-walled pile set in a bleak two-level car park – is probably the cheapest office block ever built in Dublin. But again, that didn't deter the state from renting the bulk of its 64,000 square feet for, of all people, An Foras Forbartha – the National Institute for Physical Planning and Construction Research! And with this state covenant under its belt, the St Martin's Property Company was able to mortgage the new block to raise low-interest finance for developments elsewhere, mostly in Britain.

M.W. Design's next move was to run up an office block for

Burlington Road on behalf of a mystery Hong Kong-registered company called Munster Finance and Investments, which may have been controlled by Robert Morton himself. No. 4 Burlington Road, a fine three-storey house standing in its own grounds, had been the official residence of Dr George Otto Simms, then Church of Ireland Archbishop of Dublin. Munster Finance bought it for £65,000 in mid-1966, and M.W. Design immediately submitted plans for an office development on the site. With the area rezoned from residential to office use, the Corporation was hardly in a position to refuse and so, in January 1967, the former Archbishop's house was mercilessly demolished. A giant crane with a steel ball was erected on the site and it made quick work of the old house, the *Irish Builder* reported. 'Fireplaces, windows, fittings were smashed out of existence. The crane rained blow upon blow on the symetrical Victorian facade, sparing nothing. The Tuscan columns of the porch, the granite steps and the railings were destroyed as if they were worthless. A worker on the site, when asked if anything was being saved, replied that this would only prolong the work of demolition.'

The next killing was engineered by the ACC when they sold No. 8 in June 1967 for £50,000, netting a profit of over 100 per cent on the price they paid just three years earlier. 'It is precisely this speculative-type purchase for later sale at enormous profit that is responsible for the decay and destruction of the finest parts of Dublin', said the *Irish Builder*. 'The vultures will now flock to Burlington Road to feed on the remaining fine houses.' And they did. Dr Raymond Cross, who owned No. 2, right behind Davitt House, turned down offer after offer for his property until he finally got the price he wanted – a whopping £92,000 – in October 1967. The purchaser was Harleigh Ltd, jointly owned by Hardwicke and Irish Life, and they demolished the house six months later to get the ground on which it stood as the site for an office block. The same consortium had already acquired No. 8 from the ACC, and this house was also demolished, despite the fact that it had been refurbished less than ten years earlier with a superb conservatory extension by Michael Scott and Partners. In their place, Mont Kavanagh and the property men from Irish Life built two office blocks – both designed (naturally)

by Brian Hogan – and they were successfully pre-let to IBM Ireland and Allied Irish Banks. Meanwhile, Hardwicke itself had bought the cleared site at No. 4 from 'Munster Finance' and built a third office block there, using M.W. Design's plans. On completion in 1969, this building was leased by the Economic and Social Research Institute, which had been based in a Georgian house on Lower Baggot Street. Obviously, however, the old building was no longer in tune with the trendy image the ESRI was trying to project. But this kind of image-making costs money. As a result of the move, the ESRI's yearly rental bill shot up from £1,845 to almost £25,000 and, with at least two rent reviews since then, it is likely that the bill – paid by the taxpayer, of course – now exceeds £150,000 per annum.

By the time Hardwicke, Irish Life and 'Munster Finance' were finished, there was only one large detached house left on the east side of Burlington Road. No. 6 had been the offices of Nicholas O'Dwyer and Partners, consulting engineers, but in July 1969 it was acquired by a group of property speculators trading as Baggotrath Investments. Their architects were Stephenson and Gibney, who also designed a better-than-average modern building for the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies just across the road, and – needless to say – the consulting engineers for the scheme were Nicholas O'Dwyer and Partners. After the house had been demolished, the site (with full planning permission for another office block) was sold to Bank of Ireland Finance, which built its new headquarters there. Baggotrath Investments did very well out of the deal, but this was hardly surprising given that the brains behind the venture was John Lowe, a Cork-born property high-flyer, one-time chairman of Trinity Bank and director of Charterhouse (Ireland).

In 1971, Lowe set up another company called Cameo Investments and used it as the vehicle for a take-over of the publicly-quoted Central Hotel group. Lowe and his associates had no interest in the old hotel on Exchequer Street other than using it as an asset base to build up a property empire. The group was renamed Dublin and Central Properties, and planning permission was soon obtained for a massive office development fronting on Upper Baggot Street, beside St

Martin's House. This drab and overbearing L-shaped block, designed by Downes Meehan and Robson, was completed at the end of 1973 and all 93,000 square feet of lettable office space was taken up by AnCO, the industrial training authority.

Dublin and Central was riding high. Its shares were being traded on the Stock Exchange at an unparalleled peak of 265p. Lowe and his friends in Cameo Investments, which controlled 59 per cent of the company, were sitting on huge paper profits. The property boom looked as if it would go on forever and, on this rather shaky reasoning, Dublin and Central advanced a total of over £800,000 to Cameo to fund the acquisition of more 'prime' sites, which would then be transferred to the main company when site assembly had been completed. It proved to be a most injudicious investment. Early in 1974, following the first oil crisis and the fringe banking crash in London, the property market collapsed like a house of cards. The Central Hotel, valued at about £400,000 in 1971, was put up for auction but withdrawn when bidding stopped at £160,000. Its long-serving staff were laid off with the minimum redundancy payments and, though the hotel was acquired shortly afterwards by the Belton group, it didn't last. The development sites assembled by Cameo Investments were also sold off at a substantial loss and there seemed to be no prospect that it could ever repay the loans advanced by Dublin and Central, which by then was in dire straits. The company was caught up in the classic bind between high interest rates and static rental returns from its office block in Upper Baggot Street. Losses were accumulating at the rate of £300,000-plus a year and, by May 1976, Dublin and Central's shares had plummeted to a rock-bottom price of just 46p, at which point they were suspended.

Then, out of the blue, a saviour of sorts arrived in the person of chartered accountant Conor Crowley, brother of Niall and Lawrence and, like them, a senior partner in Stokes Kennedy Crowley, the largest Irish accountancy firm. Conor dabbled in property and, like many others in the business, he was a strong supporter of Fianna Fáil; indeed, he was a member of the party's elite fund-raising committee. His brothers were more circumspect about their political allegiances.

Lawrence earned himself an unenviable reputation as Ireland's most proficient liquidator, a role that turned him into something of a champion in the cause of company law reform. Niall Crowley, on the other hand, was unapologetically 'pro-business' in his public pronouncements. One of the most powerful figures in Irish banking and finance, he had the unique distinction of heading two of the country's biggest financial institutions at the same time, as chairman of both Allied Irish Banks and Irish Life from 1977 to 1983.

Meanwhile, along with Cork solicitor John Ronan, Conor Crowley first bought up Cameo Investments and then made an offer for the remaining 41 per cent of Dublin and Central, at a price of 65p per share. And despite the fact that a major rent review was due in 1979 on the Baggot Street office block, which would more than double the rent roll to over £½ million a year, the hard-pressed ordinary shareholders decided to cut their losses and accept the offer. Just over a year later, in January 1979, Dublin and Central sold its office block – its only real asset – to Irish Life for £6 million in what *Hibernia* described as 'the most extraordinary deal of the decade'. The sale netted the company's remaining shareholders, principally Conor Crowley and John Ronan, a minimum profit of £2 million and put a value of about 300p on Dublin and Central shares – almost five times what they had paid for them thirteen months earlier. Less than six years later, however, it seemed as if Irish Life had bought a pig in a poke. Serious structural defects were discovered in the Baggot Street office block and much of it had to be rebuilt – at a cost to the company estimated at £1 million.

But the realisation that modern office blocks could be even more 'gerry-built' than the Georgian houses they replaced sank in only very slowly and, in the meantime, Irish Life got on with the business it knew best. Like every other insurance company in town, it had long set its sights on property in the vicinity of its Mespil Road headquarters. As far back as 1966, the company put forward a thoroughly outrageous scheme to demolish eight solid three-storey houses in the middle of a Regency terrace on Mespil Road and put up a large office block in their place. Irish Life acquired 'options' to buy these houses from a firm of estate agents, who had

gone knocking on doors in the area to persuade the existing owners to sell. 'Some of these calls were made upon middle-aged and old people at ten o'clock at night, after confession, accompanied by cheque-waving and all the rest', *Build* magazine reported. The residents were told that their property would be ruined by building operations if they held out, that they were standing in the way of 'progress' and denying jobs to construction workers or that in the end the Corporation would come along and condemn their houses if they didn't agree to sell. However, the Corporation refused permission for Irish Life's scheme and this decision was upheld by the then Minister, Kevin Boland, who took a jaundiced view of plans for 'prestige' office developments in residential areas. Eventually, Irish Life had its way, at least in the case of a very fine terrace of late-Georgian houses between its Mespil Road offices and the corner of Burlington Road. One after the other, the four houses involved were bought up and, in 1970, Brian Hogan was hired to draw up plans for an office block on the site. Though still as sound as a bell, the houses were demolished ten years later and the new five-storey block was let to AnCO.

Indeed, AnCO's insatiable demand for more and more office space is a neat illustration of how the uncontrolled expansion of the state bureaucracy over the past two decades has been such a source of joy to Dublin's property developers. The agency started out in 1967 on two floors of the Department of Labour's headquarters at Davitt House. Two years later, it moved to Carrisbrook House, leasing all 30,000 square feet in the building. By 1974, AnCO was on the move again and, this time, the agency had grown so fat that it needed to rent all 93,000 square feet in Dublin and Central's Baggot Street block. From there, its continuing growth swallowed up a new building next door as well as Irish Life's latest office block on Mespil Road. Thus, from a base of less than 20,000 square feet in 1967, AnCO's headquarters staff now occupy a total of 146,000 square feet of 'prime' office space at an annual cost to the taxpayer, in rent alone, of at least £1.2 million.

By always being there to take up most of the new office space built by speculative developers, the multifarious agencies of the state had become their hidden accomplices in the destruction of Dublin.

Five

'One of our problems is the multiplicity of watchdogs. However, there is no one to watch the watchdogs, so they can gambol and bay at will, pontificating and proliferating until their sounding drowns out the small voice of civic and progressive sanity.'

It was in 1967 that ordinary Dubliners began waking up to what was happening to their city. At a time when housing was in very short supply, there was growing public concern about the wrecking activities of the property speculators and their bulldozer brigades. Hundreds of perfectly sound houses had been demolished to make way for office blocks, and hundreds more would suffer the same fate as the speculators redoubled their efforts in advance of a long-delayed move by the government to re-introduce some control over the demolition of habitable accommodation. In the meantime, housing became an inflammable political issue as the newly-formed Dublin Housing Action Committee took to the streets and occupied threatened buildings in an all-out campaign for a change in the law.

It was also in 1967 that civic-minded citizens made their way to the Black Church, off Dorset Street, to see what bright new future the Corporation was planning for the city. Most of them came away thoroughly confused by all the coloured zoning maps that the planners had put together to meet their statutory obligations under the 1963 Planning Act. This was the city's first draft development plan, and the fact that it was produced at all was something of a miracle. The new Act imposed enormous responsibilities on the local

authorities yet, when it was being processed through the Dáil, there were no more than a dozen qualified town planners in the whole country and crash courses had to be laid on in Bolton Street to make instant planners out of a motley collection of architects, engineers and surveyors. The Corporation's own planning department remained seriously undermanned throughout the 1960s and the harassed staff, operating out of a cramped old building in Christchurch Place, were barely able to cope with the day-to-day flow of planning applications – never mind draw up a comprehensive development plan for the city.

Certainly, the preservation groups hadn't much faith in the Corporation. They feared that the planners, if left to their own devices, would not take steps to protect what was left of Dublin's architectural heritage. So An Taisce commissioned a major report on the issues involved, the Amenity Study of Dublin and Dun Laoghaire, published in 1967. This seminal contribution to the conservation debate was compiled by two sympathetic architects, John Costello and Kevin Fox, along with the then chairman of An Taisce, structural engineer Joe McCullough, and its president, W.A. Watts, who later became Provost of Trinity College. Apart from a fairly predictable list of important individual buildings, mostly in public or institutional ownership, the report recommended that certain areas of the city should be preserved because of their major architectural merit, distinctive Dublin character or scenic quality. However, An Taisce has always been a fairly timid organisation and it is abundantly clear that the authors of the report did not cast their net widely enough. Their 'must be preserved' category was confined to the Merrion/Fitzwilliam area, the east and south sides of St Stephen's Green (including Hume Street and Ely Place) and, on the northside, only Henrietta Street. As far as An Taisce was concerned, new buildings could be permitted almost everywhere else, provided that they conformed in some way with the existing scale and 'distinctive character' of the streetscape. Indeed, not long after resigning as chairman of An Taisce, McCullough startled conservationists by suggesting that the centre of Dublin 'is ripe for redevelopment and should be levelled'. By then, of course, he was involved as a consultant in a variety of large office projects around town.

The message inherent in An Taisce's weak-kneed approach to preservation was not lost on the developers. In March 1967, a company called Setanta Investments sought outline permission for a gargantuan office development stretching from Nassau Street to Molesworth Street, from Kildare Street to South Frederick Street. This was the most audacious 'urban renewal' scheme yet presented to Dublin Corporation and, naturally, it was for an area that didn't need such wholesale 'renewal'. Setanta Investments was a joint venture by Hardwicke and New Ireland Assurance and the company's directors included Mont Kavanagh and Senator Eoin Ryan. Over a period of several years, New Ireland and Jones Lang Wooton, acting for Hardwicke, had been quietly assembling the 2½-acre site and, by the time the planning application was submitted, they had acquired an interest in most of the fifty-five different properties involved. But their use of the name Setanta drew the wrath of Uinseann MacEoin, the indefatigable editor of *Build* magazine. 'If ever a redevelopment group hiding under the patriotic name of the young Cuchulain represented a powerful phalanx of wrap-the-green-flag-round-me-boys Irish nationalism and the know-how of London finance, it is this one. So much so that were they to set their eye on the Archbishop's Palace in Drumcondra, it is more than likely that they would get it.'

Dublin Corporation initially refused permission for the Setanta scheme – but not because the planners were concerned about the destruction of whole terraces of Georgian houses in the immediate vicinity of Leinster House. No, the Corporation's sole reason was that it wanted the former Mineral Waters factory in the centre of the site for a public car park! Setanta then appealed to Kevin Boland and although the Department of Local Government held a public inquiry, few people had any real doubt about the outcome. And sure enough, in September 1968, Boland gave Setanta almost everything they wanted. Given the political muscle of those involved, this was not too surprising, but Boland was also helped by the fact that there had been barely a murmer of protest from the preservationist camp. Indeed, it was long after his outline permission had established the principle of a massive office development in the area that the conservation

groups began to express their concern but, by then, they were reduced to tinkering with the mere details.

Setanta's architects were the same group that gave us Lansdowne House – Brian Hogan of Tyndall Hogan Hurley, with Fitzroy Robinson and Partners as consultants – and the huge project team included mechanical engineer Sean Mulcahy whose wife, art expert Rosemarie, was a leading light in An Taisce at the time. Their brief was to encase over a quarter of a million square feet of office space in a series of new buildings on the site and if they managed to maintain the existing scale of the streetscape with the minimum of visual intrusion, so much the better. However, the conservation groups didn't warm to the mass standardisation of gravy-coloured pre-cast concrete units originally proposed by the architects. Mont Kavanagh wanted to overcome their objections, if at all possible. Anxious to ingratiate himself with the cultural elite, he didn't want it to appear that Hardwicke was just another coterie of 'monsters and vandals'. He saw, too, that most of the chaps involved in the conservation movement were from the same social background as himself and if they really were 'gentlemen', then he could do business with them. So Kavanagh wined and dined the leading preservationists at Hardwicke's headquarters, a well-appointed late-Georgian house in Wellington Road, and soon reached agreement with them on the huge Setanta scheme. The threatened houses on the Kildare Street/Molesworth Street corner would be replaced by replicas and the elevations of the remaining office blocks, except for the largest one on Nassau Street, would be brick-clad and redesigned in a manner more sympathetic to the Georgian streetscape of the area. Arrangements were also made with the Irish Georgian Society, among others, to salvage important architectural features from the houses scheduled for demolition.

Mont Kavanagh thought he had it all sewn up when the Corporation granted its approval for the revised plans in October 1971. But Uinseann MacEoin had not been to the lunches in Wellington Road and he lodged a blanket appeal against the entire scheme. This held up the development for more than a year, which meant that it missed out on the big office letting boom. Meanwhile, New Ireland got cold feet

and sold its stake in Setanta to British Land, though this change in the complexion of the development company was not generally known at the time. The vast project was finally completed in 1975, in the middle of a recession, and the bulk of its five acres of office space was let to the state. Two years later, the entire complex was acquired as an investment by the British National Coal Board pension fund for £12 million, though in 1978 the state agreed to buy one of the blocks (Kildare House) for £3 million. In 1983, the Guinness and Aer Lingus pension funds paid £8 million for an even smaller block (Molesworth House) and, by this yardstick, the whole Setanta Centre would have a putative value of £50 million – almost ten times when it cost to build in 1975.

The Masonic Hall in Molesworth Street was one of the few buildings in the area to survive the depredations of Setanta. But the wily Freemasons went ahead with an office development of their own at the rear of their impressive headquarters and this block, B.P. House, now provides the secret society with a tidy income – enough, perhaps, to ensure that it remains in Dublin instead of moving to Belfast, as many of its members would prefer. And so, with new office blocks on both sides, South Frederick Lane went through a metamorphosis to become Setanta Place, a cheerless canyon relieved only by the illuminated sign for Hunter's Bar. This drinking emporium is the flagship of the Belton chain, owned by former Lord Mayor Paddy Belton, who has also dabbled in the office property market. Through a front company called Europa Inns, Belton built a four-storey office block beside the Huguenot graveyard in Merrion Row and found a most unusual tenant in the National Museum before selling the block to the Guinness pension fund. Around the corner, in Ely Place, the Knights of Columbanus indulged in a burst of materialism by building an L-shaped office block in the back gardens of Ely House, their sumptuous headquarters. With the Office of Public Works as tenants, the rental income from this block should provide a sound base in the years ahead for both the Knights' charitable works and their right-wing campaigns.

But let us return to Kevin Boland, the man who turned Setanta from a mythological figure into bricks and mortar.

Every Minister for Local Government has become embroiled in planning controversies and Boland, though slightly more even-handed than most, inevitably stirred up quite a few hornet's nests. One of the more notorious cases involved plans for a petrol filling station in Mountpleasant Square, an enclave of eighteenth-century houses designated for preservation in the Corporation's draft development plan. In 1967, a motor dealer called Phillip Lahart bought the tree-lined Ranelagh Road frontage of the square from the local tennis club for less than £10,000 and then resorted to the time-honoured expedient of publishing his planning notice *as gaeilge*. The Corporation refused permission for the petrol station, not least because Ranelagh Road was a major clearway, but Boland overturned this decision on appeal and shortly afterwards, one of the big oil companies reputedly offered Lahart £62,000 for his site. Local residents were incensed, none more so than Fergus O'Brien, an ESB official who lived in a house just across the road. He took part in a noisy campaign against the scheme, culminating in an unprecedented decision by the City Council to revoke Boland's outline permission and, later, the acquisition of the site for a small public park. It was largely on the strength of this famous victory that Fergus O'Brien launched himself into politics and he now serves in Kevin Boland's old department, as Minister of State for the Environment.

Lahart was not the only speculator nosing around the area in search of a quick killing. Back in 1964, a company with the curious name of An Cumann Forbartha Cill Mocargáin (literally, the Leeson Development Society) demolished a fine ensemble of Victorian houses on Appian Way and put up two morbidly functional blocks of flats, designed by Alan Hope on one of his off days. The man behind the development was Dr Dermot Roden, an enterprising medical practitioner with cash to spare and a knack for investing it in property. He certainly hit the jackpot on Appian Way, selling the two blocks to Irish Life in 1967 for the then staggering sum of £300,000. At the same time, Roden's little 'cumann' was pestering the Corporation with plans for an office block and/or petrol station on the site of five sound houses in the middle of a terrace in Upper Leeson Street, opposite Christ

Church. Backed by local residents, the Corporation repeatedly refused permission for Roden's various schemes but, in the meantime, the houses were all 'de-tenanted', bricked-up and left to join the ranks of Dublin's eyesores. Roden later sold out to Hardwicke, but they also failed to get approval for an office development on the site and, after many years of dereliction, the houses were eventually rebuilt as flats by the Cork-born architect-turned-developer, Finbarr Holland.

The Upper Leeson Street area was predominantly residential and zoned as such by the Corporation, but it was bound to come under severe pressure from developers who saw it as a prime candidate for absorption into the expanding 'office mecca' around Ballsbridge. Fortunately, many of the local residents were well-heeled professional people who had the resources and the clout to defend their environment against almost continuous predatory assaults. In May 1968, under the leadership of surgeon's wife Carmencita Hederman and architect Martin Reynolds, they formed the Upper Leeson Street Residents' Association to fight a proposal to rezone a large chunk of the area from residential to office use. This speculative scheme affected a total of eighty-eight houses in the triangle bounded by Leeson Park, Appian Way and Upper Leeson Street, and it was put forward by architects Stephenson and Gibney, who had their offices in the area. Under strong pressure from vested interests, Fianna Fáil members of the City Council's planning committee pushed through the rezoning proposal and, within a matter of hours, auctioneers Finnegan Menton had agents knocking at doors in the area urging the householders to sell. None did. Instead, the newly-formed residents' association lobbied city councillors and the controversial rezoning decision was hastily reversed just two months later.

By vigorously resisting nefarious plans to convert houses into offices and pressurising the Corporation to enforce the law against unauthorised conversions, the Upper Leeson Street association showed how a vigilant, well-organised pressure group could achieve results. They were not always successful, however. One of their losing battles was with Sean MacEntee, the veteran Fianna Fáil politician and former Tanaiste, who lived for many years in a substantial detached house on Leeson

Park. In 1970, claiming that he could no longer maintain the property, he sought permission to convert the house into offices. (There was nothing exceptional about this; even Sean MacBride, the Nobel and Lenin laureate, once had plans for an office block on the site of his family home, Roebuck House, in Clonskeagh.) MacEntee's proposal was turned down by the Corporation for the quite sensible reason that, if granted, it might not be possible later to resist plans for an office development on the site. Indeed, one of the real problems inherent in the Corporation's rigid zoning system was that there seemed to be no middle course between converting an unlisted house into offices and demolishing the building to make way for a modern office block. MacEntee was undeterred. He appealed to the then Minister for Local Government, party colleague Bobby Molloy, who granted permission for the scheme. Shortly afterwards, the old Fianna Fáil warhorse was able to sell his house at a greatly inflated price to the Construction Industry Federation, which used the building for several years as its headquarters.

The residents' association also failed to put a stop to P.V. Doyle's gallop. But then, he was an immensely successful self-made man who was also seen to be 'doing his bit' for the country by building hotels for high-spending tourists. A teetotal workaholic and builder by trade, Doyle's first venture was the South County Hotel, opened in 1962. With true native cunning, he quickly cashed in on the tourism boom by building a string of typically functional 'Grade A' hotels – the Montrose (1964), the Green Isle (1965), the Skylon (1967) and the Tara Tower (1969) – and became the most formidable force in the business. But Doyle was not one for resting on his laurels and he was already laying plans for the Burlington, the biggest hotel ever built in Ireland. In 1968, he paid a large sum to Wesley College and acquired Tullamaine Hall, a substantial Victorian house on its own grounds at Sussex Road. But local residents were appalled by the sheer size of Doyle's dream hotel – seven storeys high with 420 bedrooms – and the fact that the architects, Henry J. Lyons and Partners, made no effort whatever to produce a scheme that would blend with the streetscape of the area. Instead, what they proposed was a shameless slab, with ghastly horizontal

banding in white pre-cast concrete and continuous aluminium windows. To protect the residential amenity of the area against this monstrous intrusion, the Corporation refused planning permission, but Doyle had no trouble getting clearance for the scheme from Kevin Boland. Bord Fáilte coughed up almost £324,000 – the largest single grant ever paid out for a new hotel – and the Burlington opened for business in May 1972.

In the meantime, P. V. Doyle had become a director of Bord Fáilte and, just before the grant scheme was abolished, he secured aid packages for two more hotels, though neither of these were completed for several years. The Berkeley Court, built on the remaining three acres of Trinity College's botanic gardens in Lansdowne Road, was held up by objections from Jury's Hotel, right next door, and it didn't open its doors until 1978. The Westbury's gestation was even longer. As far back as 1970, Doyle got planning permission for a new hotel on the former Carmelite Convent site in Clarendon Street. However, after demolishing the old buildings, he left the site derelict for a decade before beginning work on the project. Then the building, a good example of Lego architecture, was left unfinished while Doyle toyed with the idea of turning it into an office block. That would have been easy because most of his hotels look like office blocks anyway. Finally, in 1984, the Westbury opened as a hotel and, as with the Berkeley Court, Doyle lavished most of his effort on the interior. But instead of being stylish, the result was merely another exercise in *nouveau riche* vulgarity – unrelieved by any indication that the hotel is in Dublin or even in Ireland.

Sir Basil Goulding was far from being *nouveau riche*. A fully-fledged baronet and pillar of the business establishment, he was chairman of Gouldings Fertilisers, which had its headquarters in Molesworth Street until Setanta arrived on the scene. In September 1964, just three weeks before the new Planning Act came into force, Goulding's secured permission for a thirteen-storey tower block at Wilton Place, despite justifiable fears among Corporation planners that it would be 'very prominent' on the banks of the Grand Canal. Six detached classical-style houses which stood on the site were

allowed to go to rack and ruin before Gouldings' demolition squads reduced them to rubble early in 1966. As an 'obituary notice' in *Build* put it, these fine houses were among 'a whole passing genre of veterans who are deemed to have outlived their usefulness and are now, in the veterinary sense, being put down'. But work on the new concrete monument, designed by London architects Schoolheifer and Burley, was held up when the writer, Mary Lavin, who lived in one of the little mews houses on Lad Lane, took a High Court action against Goulding's on the grounds that her property would be grossly overshadowed by the development. She won, but Goulding's successfully appealed to the Supreme Court and then pursued her for their legal costs. The intimate scale of the writer's environment was well and truly destroyed when Fitzwilton House, with its 75,000 square feet of office space, was completed in 1969. Thirteen years later, the building changed hands from one pension fund to another for over £7 million, roughly ten times what it cost to build.

From his top-floor suite in Fitzwilton House, Sir Basil Goulding could easily see the development potential of the old Fitzwilliam Lawn Tennis Club thirteen floors below. He also happened to be the club's president and, early in 1969, he made a proposition to the executive committee. If they would give up their Wilton Place site for redevelopment, he would provide them with a new clubhouse and tennis courts on a 2½ acre site he owned in Burlington Road, across the canal. But within a matter of days, Goulding's pitch was well and truly queered when an even more tempting offer was presented to the committee. This came from a fellow club member and pillar of the business establishment, Ken O'Reilly-Hyland, with the active support of Senator Eoin Ryan, chairman of New Ireland Assurance, and architects Sam Stephenson and Arthur Gibney, all of whom were also members of Fitzwilliam LTC. They offered the club a 4½ acre site bounded by Winton Road and Appian Way, a new clubhouse with all facilities *and* some £300,000 in cash. They were able to make this extraordinary offer because the bulk of the alternative site was accounted for by the extensive rear gardens of four large Victorian houses on Winton Road. Three of these houses were the offices of Stephenson and

Gibney, while the fourth was the family home of Senator Ryan. It was a nice, neat package and, not surprisingly, Fitzwilliam LTC jumped at it. Basil Goulding, the club's president, was left out in the cold.

And so, the club gave up their old grounds and rickety wooden clubhouse in Wilton Place and got a spanking new headquarters, designed by Stephenson and Gibney at Appian Way. Of course, it meant the loss of four good Victorian houses, but nobody in Fitzwilliam cared too much about that because their new facilities were truly opulent. They included seven hard tennis courts, four grass courts, a running track, a two-court indoor arena with seating for 1,800 spectators, six squash courts, a heated swimming pool, a sauna, changing rooms, a sun deck, two bars, a members' diningroom, a lounge with a covered balcony overlooking the centre court, a billiard room, administration offices, committee rooms, a caretaker's flat and parking space for one hundred cars. And all of this was provided, at no cost to the club, by its fairy godmothers in the form of Ken O'Reilly-Hyland, New Ireland Assurance and Stephenson and Gibney. In return, of course, they expected to make a large fortune by redeveloping the club's old property at Wilton Place. For this purpose and others, a consortium called Marlborough Holdings was set up by solicitor Liam McGonagle, a close friend of Charlie Haughey and business partner of O'Reilly-Hyland in several other property ventures. The directors of the new company included Eoin Ryan, representing New Ireland; chartered accountant Des Traynor, then a partner in Haughey Boland and Company; and O'Reilly-Hyland himself. But like John Byrne's Carlisle Trust, where Traynor was also a director, mystery surrounded the the identity of Marlborough's shareholders because the vast bulk of the 990 ordinary shares were held by a Guinness and Mahon trust company, Mars Nominees Ltd.

Kenneth Paul O'Reilly-Hyland, known to his friends as 'KPO'RH' or simply as 'Kenser', was no stranger to the property world. In his public life, he was chairman of Burmah-Castrol (Ireland) Ltd as well as a Fianna Fáil appointee to various state boards (Aer Lingus, the Central Bank etc) and a director of numerous companies in the private sector, including Friends

Provident and Hill Samuel. Behind the scenes, his business contacts proved very useful during his long period as chairman of Fianna Fáil's fund-raising committee and, meanwhile, he devoted much of his spare time to property speculation. Indeed, as far back as 1963, he tried his hand at getting permission for multi-storey blocks of flats on the extensive tree-fringed grounds of his splendid mansion, Noursdale Park, in Milltown. Two years later, he and McGonagle set up a property company, amusingly called Kenser Estates, which set its sights on eight little cottages in Donnybrook village. The company's agents, Finnegan Menton, gave the unfortunate tenants six months notice along with a get-out offer of £400 and, over a period of years, the cottages were hacked down one after the other with 'fierce and indescribable violence', as *Build* reported at the time. The half-demolished terrace became a well-known eyesore until, eventually, it was replaced by a hideous row of twelve two-storey shops, with aluminium fronts, plastic fascias and just blank pre-cast panels on top. This appalling scheme, part of which has itself been demolished to make way for Donnybrook's new fire station, was designed by Richard Hurley, a senior partner in Tyndall Hogan Hurley. But the man who made it all possible was Kevin Boland because he overturned the Corporation's decision to refuse planning permission for the development.

O'Reilly-Hyland went on to become Master of Fox Hounds with the Meath Hunt, a Knight of Malta and Commendatore dell'Ordine Equestre di Sant Agata. He bought Ounavarra, a stately home on its own demesne near Gorey, Co Wexford, and sold Noursdale Park – after first getting outline permission for a flats development. To conceal the fact that he was involved, this was done through Finnegan Menton and the name of the applicant was given as Ardmore Securities. Since then, Kenser has been living in regal splendour in an embassy-sized mansion on Ailesbury Road. His motto in life, so he has told friends, is 'When times are good, eat well; when times are bad, dress well'. In 1972, he had some scathing things to say about conservation groups. 'One of our problems is the multiplicity of watchdogs', he told a property seminar. 'However, there is no one to watch the watchdogs,

so they can gambol and bay at will, pontificating and proliferating until their sounding drowns out the small voice of civic and progressive sanity. Great schemes that would bring a fair profit, and better working and living conditions for many, are jeopardised. Costs mount and funding operations approach the danger-line. Some projects are quietly buried, and the losers are the city and its people.'

O'Reilly-Hyland's principal legacy to Dublin is Telephone House, the pre-cast concrete monstrosity near the top of Marlborough Street. How many would agree that this 'great scheme' is the product of 'civic and progressive sanity' or that, if it had been 'quietly buried', the losers would be 'the city and its people'? Certainly, Marlborough Street was ripe for redevelopment, but there was no aesthetic justification for what the Marlborough Holdings consortium built there. This enormous eight-storey block, more than twice the height of its neighbours, was designed by Brian Hogan, of Tyndall Hogan Hurley, who was a great friend of Kenser's brother, quantity surveyor Dermot O'Reilly-Hyland. It replaced a total of thirteen tenement buildings with shops at ground-floor level, which were acquired as a 'package' by Kenser Estates. The Corporation turned down plans for the new office block, mainly because of its inordinate height, but this view was obviously not shared by Kevin Boland. In February 1967, he granted planning permission for the scheme without imposing a single condition relating to the size, scale or form of the development. There had been no oral hearing and no 'baying and gambolling' by the conservation groups, despite the fact that this huge lump of a building is particularly offensive when viewed from North Great George's Street. There were supposed to be twelve shops at street level as well as a bar, restaurant and ballroom on the first floor, but these social facilities were dropped when all 83,000 square feet of space in the new block were pre-let to the Department of Posts and Telegraphs before construction work even started in 1969. This coup was organised by John Finnegan, who *is* Finnegan Menton. Later, the completed building was sold for a substantial profit to New Ireland Assurance, whose property investment manager, John O'Connor, maintained unusually close links with Kenser's ventures over the years.

Quite the most bizarre was O'Reilly-Hyland's scheme for the Greenmount oil company site beside Harold's Cross Bridge. Wearing his hat as chairman of Burmah-Castrol, which had acquired the 4½-acre site in 1969, he announced plans for a £3.5 million office, shopping and residential complex. Also designed by Tyndall Hogan Hurley, this 'complex' was to include a ten-storey office block, two maisonette blocks, a shopping 'precinct', a multi-level car park and a seventeen-storey hotel with 420 bedrooms! In short, it was an altogether incredible proposal for a highly-marginal area, yet there was Kenser himself, in a big photograph in the *Irish Times* property supplement, fondling a match-stick model of the scheme. Blinking in disbelief, the Corporation refused permission – mainly because the site was zoned industrial – but Bobby Molloy overturned this decision on appeal in May 1972.

It was at this point that things began to get a little murky on the old Greenmount site. Ownership of the property passed to a £2 company called Echo Holdings, whose only directors were solicitor Pat O'Connor, Charlie Haughey's closest confidant and the man at the centre of the 'double voting' affair in the 1982 general election, and his son Michael O'Connor, who also held one of the two £1 shares. The other was in the name of Pat O'Connor's wife Maureen, and the registered address of the company was at his offices on Upper Ormond Quay. Echo Holdings retained the derelict site for ten years, though the company failed to go ahead with revised plans for a major office development. Then, late in 1980, agents Finnegan Menton put up two hoardings advertising the site for sale with full planning permission for four large office blocks and finally, in March 1982, the property was sold for about £1.3 million to Dodder Properties, who proceeded almost immediately with a more modest development of flats and offices.

Two months earlier, Pat O'Connor and his son resigned from the 'board' of Echo Holdings and they were replaced by two accountants from another company with Haughey links, Management and Investment Services Ltd. This firm was founded by Samuel Field-Corbett, a former partner in Haughey Boland and Company, who also cropped up as a director of the only two companies with which Haughey himself had been officially associated – Abbeyville Ltd, the

vehicle he used to acquire his Kinsealy estate, and Larchfield Securities, which served as a cover for his purchase of Inishvickillaune, off the Kerry coast. Coincidentally, for several months prior to the sale of the Greenmount site, there had been intense speculation that Haughey was in financial trouble. If that was so, then his problems may have been solved by the sale of the Harold's Cross property. Certainly, there are few – if any – worldly-wise property men around town who do not believe that Haughey was the hidden owner of the Greenmount site. However, when the whole affair was detailed by *The Phoenix* in January 1983, there was a prompt denial from Pat O'Connor. 'Neither Mr Haughey, any member of his family nor any person or body corporate on his behalf have at any time, directly or indirectly, had any interest in Echo Holdings Ltd or in the property referred to', he said in a letter to the magazine.

Meanwhile, things hadn't worked out terribly well for Ken O'Reilly-Hyland and his friends in Marlborough Holdings when it came to redeveloping the old Fitzwilliam tennis club site. Stephenson and Gibney drew up plans for 300,000 square feet of office space in three 12-storey towers, imitating the elevations of their original scheme for the Civic Offices at Wood Quay, and planning permission was granted without any fuss in September 1970. Not long afterwards, however, O'Reilly-Hyland, Des Traynor and some of the other mystery shareholders got an attack of the jitters about the sheer size of the development and they sold out to McInerney Properties for £340,000. The Fitzwilliam Plaza project, as it was called, then became a fifty-fifty venture by McInerneys and New Ireland. It was scaled down to three 9-storey towers and work was supposed to start in mid-1973, but high interest rates and the onset of a recession forced an indefinite postponement. McInerney's cut their losses and got out, leaving New Ireland to hold what had become a very troublesome baby. Sam Stephenson's deep-plan towers, which depended on expensive air-conditioning, were by now totally unrealistic in the wake of the energy crisis. And although he later produced a dramatic new design, featuring glass blocks in the shape of giant prisms, he lost the job. The site lay fallow until 1979 when the Industrial Credit Company agreed to buy just

over a third of it and New Ireland got a firm commitment from the Industrial Development Authority, a veritable hive of empire builders, that they would rent the bulk of the office space in the Wilton Place complex. At the IDA's instigation, the ever-reliable Brian Hogan was hired to redesign the scheme yet again and what he produced was a grey, granite-clad building with curious stainless-steel panels randomly set between narrow windows. The development was finally completed in 1984 at a total cost of some £15 million, shared between New Ireland and the ICC. New Ireland's investment was about £10 million, but it was already worth three times that figure because of the IDA's agreement to pay an exhorbitant rent of £1.5 million a year for the 150,000 square feet they will occupy in the complex. On top of that, the IDA had their offices extravagantly fitted out at an estimated cost of about £2 million and, all in all, their move to the new headquarters in Wilton Place will have stung the taxpayer for at least £5 million by the end of 1985, with recurring annual rental bills in the years ahead. No wonder the block is known as Wilton Hilton.

Meanwhile, Basil Goulding managed to get outline planning permission from Bobby Molloy in 1972 for an office and residential development on the Burlington Road site he had tried to hawk to Fitzwilliam tennis club. A few years later, he sold the land to the Insurance Corporation of Ireland, which built its new headquarters there to a design by Goulding's favourite architects, Schoolheifer and Burley. But it took strong pressure from the Upper Leeson Street Residents Association to ensure that the residential content of the scheme was actually built and, to fulfill this side of the bargain, Finbarr Holland was brought in to provide yet another of his now standard blocks of flats. In such small victories is progress measured in the city.

Six

'This was a decision in which no iconoclastic Fianna Fáil minister had hand, act or part. It was made by the planning authority and formally acquiesced in by An Taisce, Fine Gael, Labour, the Guinness aristocracy, the Dublin City Council, Senator Sheehy Skeffington, Uncle Tom Cobley and all.'

Kevin Boland was not a man for mincing words. Unlike other ministers, he placed no reliance on the sanitised guff churned out by civil service speechwriters. When he had something to say, no matter how unpalatable, he came right out and said it – which is why his infamous 'belted earls' speech will go down in history as the most inflammatory contribution to the conservation debate ever made by a senior politician.

Boland's diatribe was delivered in the Dáil on 11 March 1970, mid-way through the six-month-long occupation of Hume Street, and as a piece of sustained invective, it would certainly take some beating. But the colourful minister was in a corner. He was defending himself against accusations that he had sold Dublin's architectural heritage down the river by approving the Green Property Company's plans for a modern office development on the corner of Hume Street and St Stephen's Green. Indeed, a famous cartoon at the time depicted Boland as an Irish King Kong, climbing over the precious classical remnants of the city.

He hit back with a vengeance. Fulminating against 'the Guinness aristocracy who pull the strings to which the Georgians dance' he described the Hume Street occupation as 'an open act of piracy' and said the whole agitation had been 'induced and conducted by fraud, falsehood, concealment and misrepresentation'. Those behind it were 'a consortium of belted earls and their ladies and left-wing intellectuals' who, along with 'the Lord High Editor of the *Irish Times*' and 'a group of pampered students', could 'afford the time to stand and contemplate in ecstasy . . . this eighth wonder of the world, the twin architectural masterpieces at the corner of Hume Street and St Stephen's Green'. They were 'aesthetic hijackers' and the 'more rabid and aggressive elements' involved in 'this present sanctimonious hullabaloo' were also, according to Boland, 'prominently engaged in the attempt to eliminate the most fundamental component of our heritage, which is the national language' through the then very active Language Freedom Movement. Indeed, he even suggested that some of them only wanted to preserve Hume Street because it then contained the national headquarters of the Fine Gael party.

Conservationists were incensed, especially the idealistic band of people who were holding out in No. 45 St Stephen's Green to save it from the clutches of the Green Property Company. The occupation, a milestone in the long struggle to preserve what's left of old Dublin, started on 15 December 1969, a Monday morning, when a group of architectural students on their way to classes in UCD noticed scaffolders at work outside the building. Inside, they found that the staircase had been ripped out and part of the roof had also gone. After raising the alarm, they were soon joined by a large contingent of fellow-students from Bolton Street and, by early afternoon, the demolition workers had no alternative but to pack their tool-bags and leave the premises. Flags and placards were hung out of the windows, a crowd gathered and, at one point, the actress Siobhan McKenna mounted the scaffolding to say that she 'thoroughly sympathised' with the action the students were taking. That evening, a joint statement was issued by An Taisce, the RIAI, the Dublin Civic Group and the Irish Georgian Society. Deploring the attempt to demolish the building, they said: 'Were it not for the public-spirited action of the student groups who prevented the demolition so quietly started over the weekend, this critical house might already be gone.'

Just two days earlier, the chairman of An Taisce, Joe McCullough, had explained the importance of the issue in an article in the *Irish Times*. 'The plain people of Ireland are

entitled to ask why bodies like An Taisce are so concerned about the preservation of Hume Street and its approaches from St Stephen's Green, when so many other Georgian buildings are demolished without comment', he wrote. His answer was that all of Hume Street as well as Ely Place and the east side of the Green were among the select groups of buildings listed for preservation in Dublin Corporation's draft development plan. They were also included in the 'absolute minimum list' compiled by An Taisce, which covered less than one per cent of the city's area. If they were demolished, he warned, 'the cancer will spread up through Ely Place and so on to the great squares'.

For at least three years, there had been growing disquiet about the fate of St Stephen's Green, which is the oldest planned public space in Dublin. One large chunk of the south side had already gone in the making of Hainault House and Colmstock House, so there was tangible evidence of anarchy. In August 1966, seventeen concerned citizens – including Maurice Gorham, Kevin B. Nowlan, Micheal MacLiammoir, James Plunkett and Peadar O'Donnell – warned in a letter to the *Irish Times* that considerable areas of the Green 'may be demolished before the public has been given an opportunity to judge the merits and demerits of the developers' proposals'. They urged that a substantial proportion of the existing buildings 'should be scheduled for preservation as an important cultural legacy and not be left to the whim of the speculative developers'. A few months later, adding insult to injury, the Office of Public Works tore away the fine entrance gates at the Merrion Row corner of the Green and started work on a Stonehenge-style setting for Edward Delany's statue of Wolfe Tone. In *Build* magazine, Michael Quinn wrote, 'Might I humbly recommend instead that a larger-than-life size *hyena* be erected. It would represent more properly the sort of people interested in the Green these days.'

Across the road, beside the Huguenot graveyard, a group of four Georgian buildings – including the DBC cafe – were being demolished to make way for a five-storey office block. The principals in this case were Greengate Estates, a speculative venture by that most effective of combinations – an auctioneer (John Harvey McFarlane, of Osborne King and

Megran), a solicitor (Peter Donald Prentice, of Matheson Ormsby and Prentice) and an accountant (Howard Waterhouse Robinson, a major shareholder in City of Dublin Bank and later father-in-law of Senator Mary Robinson). They had obtained planning permission for the office development in 1965, without a peep of protest from the preservationists, and then sold the site at a fat profit to the British-owned Guardian Assurance Company. The Guardian office block, designed by McDonnell and Dixon and completed in 1968, is another curtain-walled horror in the same class as Colmstock House. However, its effect on the Green is much more damaging because it stands right at the end of the important vista from Earlsfort Terrace. The architects showed little concern for its critical location, even to the extent of plonking an ugly plant-room on the roof.

Next for the hammer was a group of four buildings on the same side of the Green, beyond the corner of Kildare Street. Irish Life had picked up two of them (Nos. 18 and 19) in the 1940s, presumably for little more than a song. One had a Regency stucco facade while the second was a stunted hodge-podge of a building, occupied for many years by Adam's auction rooms. The other two properties in Irish Life's parcel were Georgian houses, acquired in the late 1950s. No. 21, formerly St Andrew's College, was by far the more impressive, with a doric portico similar to Newman House on the south side of the Green. Had it survived, this house would almost certainly have been listed for preservation. But in January 1966, before any lists were prepared, Irish Life got planning permission for an office development on the site. By this stage, however, the Corporation's planners were becoming somewhat queasy about curtain-walled horrors on the Green and they insisted that the new block must have a brick facade with the same parapet height as its neighbours. Irish Life then bought up the rear garden of the University Club, adjoining the site, and brought in Hume Holdings (veterans of Hume House, in Ballsbridge) to carry out the development. Their architect was the very self-confident Andrew Devane, of Robinson Keefe and Devane, who obligingly advised his clients that it was 'neither aesthetically desirable nor practicable' to retain any of the old buildings, even No. 21, and they

were all demolished in February 1969. Stephen Court, with its 100,000 square feet of office space, was built on the site and almost everyone agreed that this award-winning building, set around a sculptured courtyard, harmonised rather well with the established environment of the Green.

Quietly, almost surreptitiously, plans were being laid by the Green Property Company for a massive office development stretching from the corner of Hume Street to the group of buildings housing the Office of Public Works. The company was a front for London-based Allied Land and Investment, the vehicle of auctioneer and developer Marcus Leaver, but nobody was really sure because 49,999 of its 50,000 £1 shares were held anonymously by Bank of Ireland nominees. One of the company's directors was John Corcoran, a debonair ex-bookie with a Georgian mansion in Co. Wexford, who had immeasurably boosted his chances of doing well in the property world by marrying Leaver's daughter. As far as *Plan* magazine was concerned, Corcoran was 'merely acting the role of landlord's gilly for a personless London financial house', though it later emerged that he had a stake of at least 20 per cent in the Green Property Company. Gilly or not, he managed to do an extraordinary deal with Donogh O'Malley, then Parliamentary Secretary in charge of the OPW. The state held No. 46 St Stephen's Green and No. 1 Hume Street, two properties vital to Corcoran's plans, and O'Malley promised that they would be given up to facilitate the proposed development. The deal was arranged through Sam Stephenson, an active member of Fianna Fáil and a personal friend of Charles J. Haughey, one of O'Malley's closest buddies. Stephenson had thrown himself into party affairs with gusto. He designed Fianna Fáil's posters for the 1965 general election, ran unsuccessfully for a Senate seat with a nomination from the RIAI and became one of the founder members of Taca, the party fund-raising group whose £100-a-plate dinners were the scandal of the age.

Stephenson and Gibney had emerged as the most successful architectural practice in Dublin, employing a staff of over sixty to cope with an ever-growing volume of work. In March 1966, at the behest of John Corcoran, they submitted plans for an office development – similar in style to Hainault House

– covering No. 1 Hume Street and Nos 46-49 St Stephen's Green, a very fine terrace of mid eighteenth-century houses. Three of these houses had already been acquired by Corcoran's group and the other two were the state properties which O'Malley had promised to give up. And despite their undoubted architectural merit, Dublin Corporation had no hesitation in granting outline planning permission for the scheme on 2 May 1966. Not only that. The Corporation also gave the developers a written assurance that the other corner of Hume Street was not in any way affected by a preservation order. Of course, the planners would live to rue the day they made their fateful decision. But so would the conservation groups because, incredibly, none of them – *indeed, nobody at all* – bothered to appeal this crucial test case to the minister. Thus, when the three-week statutory period for lodging objections expired on 23 May, the Green Property Company had a valid planning permission in the bag and the battle for Hume Street was already lost. The preservationists had missed the boat.

In his 'belted earls' speech almost four years later, Kevin Boland would rightly point to this monumental gaffe as the root cause of all the trouble. By neglecting to appeal against the Corporation's decision, the preservationists had 'clearly failed in their duty to protect our national heritage at the appropriate time', he declared. 'This was a decision in which no iconoclastic Fianna Fáil minister had hand, act or part. It was made by the planning authority and formally acquiesced in by An Taisce, Fine Gael, Labour, the Guinness aristocracy, the Dublin City Council, Senator Sheehy Skeffington, Uncle Tom Cobley and all.'

Meanwhile, the Green Property Company lost no time in translating their uncontested permission into unshakeable facts on the ground. Several splendid fireplaces were removed from the three houses already owned by the company, including Dominican Hall, and demolition work got under way on 7 October 1966. That same evening, in Newman House, honorary membership of the Royal Town Planning Institute was being conferred on Neil Blaney, Boland's predecessor, the man who made it all possible for the developers by exempting demolition from planning control. And even as

the roofs of the three houses were being stripped off, Sam Stephenson was making another of his characteristic outbursts about 'Georgian Dublin living on borrowed time'. Addressing a Tuairim meeting in the Shelbourne Hotel, within earshot of the demolition work, he said it was 'just childish' to attempt to preserve the original character of St Stephen's Green. The preservationists should 'stop bleating about all of Georgian Dublin being preserved for posterity because posterity might not want it anyway'. For sheer arrogance, this statement could hardly be equalled. Not only was Stephenson purporting to speak for his own generation, but also for every succeeding generation of people who would live in this city. At the time, *Build* commented, 'When certain people are prepared to make a quarry out of the best parts of St Stephen's Green for a couple of greenbacks shared around their friends and are obviously able to get away with it, Foras Forbartha, the Arts Council, Bord Fáilte, An Taisce and all the rest of them might as well close their doors.'

On 29 November, when the Green Property Company's three houses had been reduced to rubble, Dr Tim O'Driscoll, director-general of Bord Fáilte, opened an impressive exhibition of photographs compiled by An Taisce as a prelude to the publication of their amenity study of the city. Referring to the famous 'one per cent' recommended for preservation, he said it was 'precisely this handful of items – a gracious streetscape, a group of trees reflected in water, a vista of mountains, a glimpse of the sea – which the people must fight strongly to preserve'. But how could An Taisce spearhead such a campaign when they had done nothing to save the three houses just lately demolished on the Green? An Taisce had not been minding the store and this led directly to the formation of a more radical ginger group, specifically devoted to the often-thankless task of monitoring the weekly lists of planning applications, making submissions to the Corporation and lodging appeals with the minister, if and when this was necessary. The Dublin Civic Group had no constitution, no rules and no formal membership. But it had a most articulate chairman in Kevin B. Nowlan, professor of modern history at UCD, a brilliant public speaker and witty

raconteur who had an intimate knowledge of Dublin and its heritage.

In December 1966, when the Office of Public Works put a notice in the newspapers advertising for sale the state's interest in No. 1 Hume Street and No. 46 St Stephen's Green, the Civic Group was among the first to raise an outcry. Under pressure, Jim Gibbons, who had succeeded O'Malley as boss of the OPW, explained that the property was being put on the market 'to ascertain its current value' and he made this important pledge: 'The two houses . . . will not be sold until all responsible views have been heard. If Dublin Corporation decides that the area should be preserved as Georgian, they will not be sold at all.' This, of course, was the whole point. The Corporation, with the help of An Taisce and a British consultant, Lord Llewellyn-Davies, was busily drawing up preservation lists as part of the city's first draft development plan. And it was precisely for this reason that the Green Property Company had so hastily demolished their three houses on the east side of the Green. There can be no argument about the preservation of buildings that no longer exist.

Sam Stephenson strongly defended what his clients were doing, in an interview with Uinseann MacEoin, the editor of *Build* magazine. 'A city must live. It must evolve and keep changing', he said. 'But why start with the best parts of it, Mr Stephenson?', he was asked. 'Because developers are primarily interested in a return for their money', the bold Sam replied. 'But this is cheque-book planning!' exclaimed MacEoin. 'That is so, but it is inevitable in a democratic society', Stephenson declared.

Meanwhile, the RIAI was advising its members and 'all architects practising in Ireland' to abstain from proceeding with any work in the areas of Dublin covered by An Taisce's preservation proposals 'pending the adoption (by the City Council) of recommendations now being prepared for it by Dublin Corporation.' However, this advice did not deter Stephenson. After the Green Property Company had bought up several other houses in and around Hume Street, he lodged plans for two Hainault House-style office blocks framing the entrance to the unique eighteenth-century enclave. 'The well-heeled London consortium is back again on the rampage

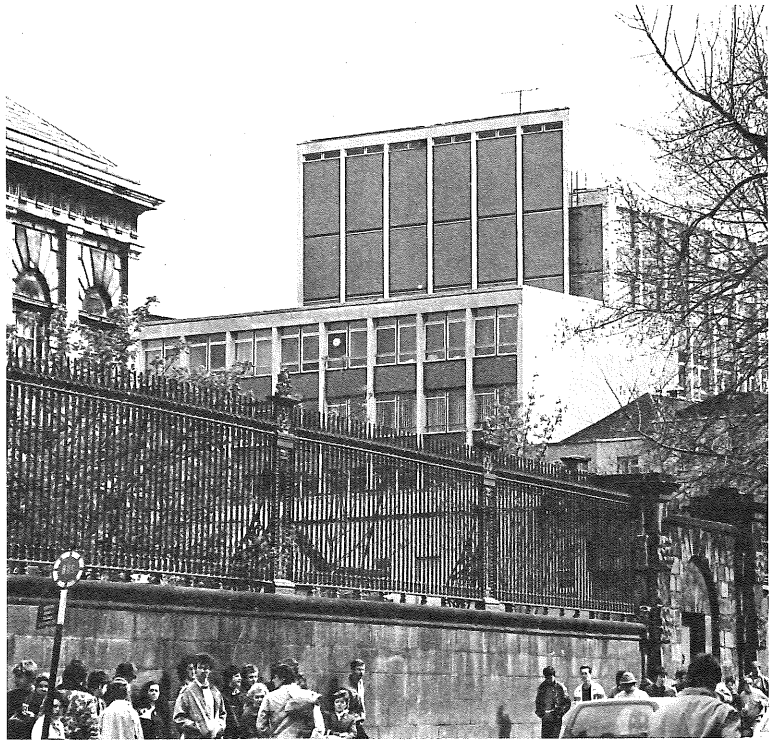
eager and willing to butcher any streetscape which escaped their last attack', said an exasperated editorial in *Build*. 'Waiting in the wings are the various political and professional buzzards ready to suck the architectural corpse.'

By this stage, all of Hume Street as well as the surviving houses on the east side of Stephen's Green had been officially listed for preservation, so the Corporation refused planning permission for Stephenson's latest scheme. The Green Property Company then appealed to Kevin Boland and there was a public inquiry in the Custom House, at which all of the conservation groups were represented. But despite their eloquent – if belated – pleadings, the most memorable phrase belonged to Stephenson. 'Hume Street', he pronounced solemnly, 'has no architectural unity whatsoever.' Finally, after a long hiatus, Boland delivered his shattering verdict. In June 1969, he granted full planning permission.

The conservationists were outraged but, by then, there was little they could do about it. They couldn't even appeal to the City Council to revoke the minister's permission because Boland himself had prorogued the council two months earlier for refusing to strike a rate. In their place, the city was being run by a Commissioner, the Cork-born former Secretary of the Department of Local Government, John Garvin. He used to hold bizarre meetings with himself at City Hall, generally for the purpose of rubber-stamping decisions already taken by the Corporation's senior bureaucrats. For Matt Macken, the City Manager, Garvin's appointment was a real godsend. Galway-born and educated, Macken had spent a lifetime working his way up through the local government service before he got the plum job of running Dublin in 1965. He was a tough, abrasive administrator who knew exactly what he wanted but he had little or no feeling for Dublin as a city. Garvin's four-year reign as Commissioner relieved Macken of the task of dealing with querulous councillors. Thus, when the much-vaunted development plan was finally adopted in 1971, Garvin – on Macken's recommendation – confirmed the Corporation's original draft without changing a single line, notwithstanding there had been over 2,000 objections and submissions from the public. The whole process of 'public participation', beginning with the first exhibition of the plan

IRISH TIMES

The houses that started it all: Nos 2 and 3 Kildare Place, just prior to their demolition in 1957 (*left*). An affront to dignity: Norwich Union's office block in Nassau Street, with the Provost's House and railings of Trinity College in the foregound (*below*).



PETER THURSFIELD

HUGH DORAN

Before and after on Lower Fitzwilliam Street: the unbroken terrace of Georgian houses (*above*) in 1961 and the same scene nine years later showing the completed ESB headquarters.

IRISH TIMES

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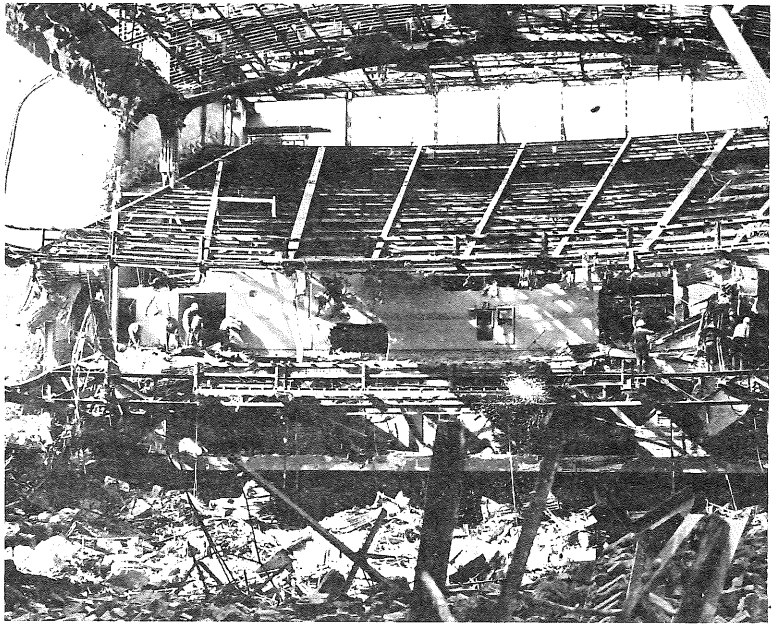
Symbols of the New Ireland: the Sugar Company headquarters looming over tattered Georgian remnants at the corner of Earlsfort Terrace and Lower Leeson Street (*top*). O'Connell Bridge House: one of the first of Dublin's 'skyscrapers' (*left*). John Byrne, pictured leaving the 'Endcamp' inquiry in 1984 (*above*).



IRISH TIMES

Death throes of a great variety house: the interior of the Theatre Royal, during demolition in 1962 (*above*). Monstrous rubbish: the Hawkins House complex which replaced the Theatre Royal, framed by the Hewett's building and Pearse Street Garda Station (*below*).

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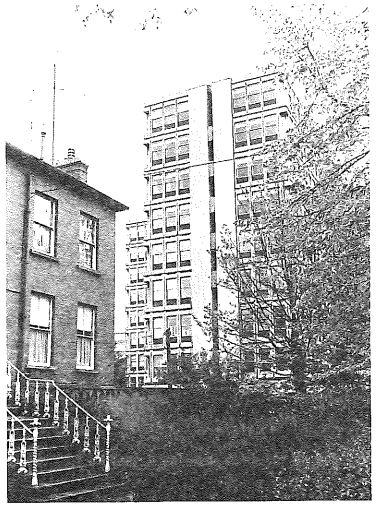
The new-look Ballsbridge: Carrisbrook House and Lansdowne House (*above*), with (*below left*) the rear elevation of Lansdowne House, showing its relationship to one of the surviving Victorian houses on Northumberland Road. Mont Kavanagh, standing in front of one of his productions on Burlington Road, with a remnant of the area's old decency (*below right*).



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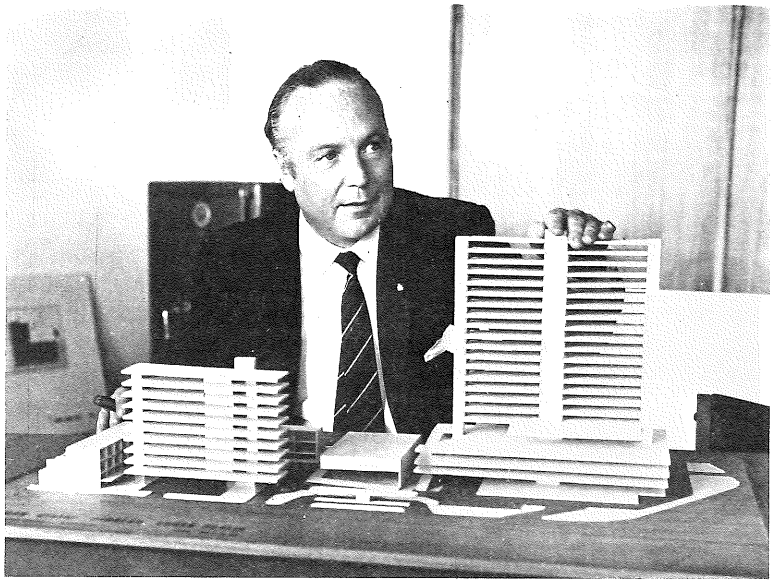

IRISH TIMES

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Ken O'Reilly-Hyland, fondling a model of his unrealised scheme for the Greenmount site in Harold's Cross (*above*). O'Reilly-Hyland's principal legacy to Dublin: the grossly oversized Telephone House block in Marlborough Street (*left*).

IRISH TIMES

Last-ditch stand: protesters squatting outside No. 45 St Stephen's Green in June 1970, during the final days of the battle for Hume Street.

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The Guardian Assurance office block, one of the curtain-walled horrors on St Stephen's Green (*above*). Sterile 'replicas': the fake-Georgian office blocks built by the Green Property Company at the corner of Hume Street and St Stephen's Green (*below*).

PETER THURSFIELD

in the Black Church four years earlier, was shown to be an elaborate charade.

About one-third of the representations from the public related to the Hume Street affair and, by the time the city plan was adopted, they had been overtaken by events. The conservation groups did try to persuade John Garvin to use his plenipotentiary powers as City Commissioner to revoke Boland's controversial planning permission. Garvin refused to do so, mainly because it would open the door to a massive claim for compensation by the Green Property Company. Indeed, the same fear was uppermost in Boland's mind and, more than anything else, this explains why he acted as he did. Because the right to private property is guaranteed by the constitution, there had to be some provision for compensation in the 1963 Planning Act. Thus, under the law as it stands, a developer such as the Green Property Company who receives outline planning permission for a particular project cannot later be denied full planning permission without the planning authority incurring a liability to pay compensation. The sums involved can often be very substantial, which is why planning authorities generally duck the issue by doing deals with the developers, even if this means granting approval for some appalling schemes. In the case of Hume Street the sum being bandied about was over £350,000, enough at the time to build more than one hundred local authority houses, as Boland pointed out in his 'belted earls' speech. 'I make no apology whatever for saying that the physical needs of the people must get priority over the aesthetic needs of Lord and Lady Guinness', he declared. 'If these aesthetic bullies are to have their way, then there is no knowing how many fewer houses [will be built] for people in need. I can say that this will be done over my dead body.'

The conservation groups then tried to thwart Green Property Company's plans by pressing the government to stand firm on Jim Gibbons' pledge that the state-owned properties in Hume Street would not be sold if the area was designated for preservation. On a balmy summer's evening in June 1969, over a thousand people attended a public meeting at the Wolfe Tone statue on the Green to hear this message being drummed home by a succession of speakers, including Garret

FitzGerald, recently elected as a Fine Gael TD for Dublin South-East. Hume Street, he said, was 'the thin end of the wedge. All that we most value in Dublin . . . is now threatened'. Afterwards, a long procession, carrying placards with slogans like 'Ireland, What Am I Bid?, made its way to Government Buildings where a letter, addressed to the Taoiseach, Jack Lynch, was handed in. It called on the government to block any sale of the state-owned properties and to adopt a 'positive and clear policy' on the preservation of important areas of Dublin, such as Hume Street.

It became clear three months later that this plea had fallen on deaf ears. Noel Lemass, who had succeeded Gibbons as Parliamentary Secretary, announced that the Hume Street houses would, after all, be placed on the 'open market' – apparently to save the estimated £46,000 it would cost the State to refurbish them. But, as *Plan* magazine said, 'How open is "open" when there is only one bidder, namely the Green Property Company?' Lemass, the son of the former Taoiseach, saw no contradiction between this shameless betrayal and the fact that he would shortly be flying to Brussels to chair a major conference on urban preservation as part of European Conservation Year!

Jack Lynch remained entirely unmoved by the pleas of the conservationists and so did his Minister of Finance, Charles Haughey. As the immediate political boss of the young Lemass, he had the power to stop the Hume Street sale, yet he did nothing. 'How does the Minister of Finance reconcile the determined philistinism in St Stephen's Green with his patronage of artists and the arts, for which he has earned a meed of praise?', the *Irish Times* asked. There was no reply from Haughey. It was becoming all too apparent that An Taisce and the other mainstream conservation groups were conducting a dialogue with a brick wall. Thus, when the Green Property Company moved to demolish No. 45 St Stephen's Green, lately the state-leased offices of the Adoption Board, it was not surprising that more radical elements took the law into their own hands by occupying the house. They won widespread public support for this action, embracing the entire spectrum from the street politics of the Connolly Youth Movement to the elite *salons* of the Georgian Society.

Even the Bricklayers' Union rowed in behind the campaign. 'People wanted to save Hume Street for a lot of different reasons – some for its beauty, some for housing, some to stop speculation', said Deirdre Kelly, one of the valiant dozen or so who stuck with the occupation for the whole six months. Among the regular callers to the house were Garret FitzGerald, often bearing cakes from the Tea Time Express shop; Michael O'Leary, then a Labour Party firebrand; and Declan Costello, the architect of Fine Gael's Just Society programme who went on to become a first-class High Court judge. At Christmas, in an empty gesture, Charlie Haughey sent around a hamper.

John Corcoran found himself caught up in a storm of protest which he had apparently never anticipated. The poor man thought his whole world was falling apart and he had to be nursed through several sleepless nights by Sam Stephenson. In January 1970, having taken more than enough flak, the Green Property Company took out quarter-page advertisements in the newspapers to explain their position – and also to make an offer. They would sell the five properties they now controlled to the preservationists for a sum 'considerably in excess of £200,000' – if it could be raised within three months. But this was more than double the market value of the houses, and Corcoran must have known that there wasn't a snowball's chance in hell that his terms would be met. After all, the voluntary groups then engaged in restoring Tailors Hall were still short of their modest target of £20,000 even after a three-year fund-raising campaign. In that light, what the Green Property Company wanted for Hume Street was a king's ransom. And when it wasn't produced, Corcoran decided the time had come to proceed with his plans.

Bill Kavanagh, who ran an outfit called K-Security, which would later specialise in 'marital investigations', was hired to do the dirty work. At the height of a long cement strike, he placed an innocuous-looking advertisement in one of the evening papers offering idle construction workers £25 each for a day's work. At 4.30 a.m. on Sunday, 7 June 1970, K-Security's newly-recruited goon squad, fifty-strong and armed with pick-axes and a battering-ram, smashed down the hall door of No. 45 St Stephen's Green. On the premises at

the time of this violent dawn raid were four stalwarts of the occupation – Duncan Stewart, Rosemary McCallion, George D. Hodnett and Marie McMahon. Three of them made for the cast-iron balcony on the first-floor where they screamed and shouted and made such a din that almost all the lights in the Shelbourne Hotel came on. They were grabbed by the goon squad, many of whom were also shouting and roaring, and dragged down the stairs over broken glass and barbed wire before being kicked out the door. Meanwhile, Rosemary McCallion had escaped with a list of supporters' telephone numbers and, after finding a working telephone kiosk, she began ringing everyone to raise the alarm. Less than an hour later, Garret FitzGerald and many others were at the scene and so was a large force of gardai. K-Security's goons had attached a chain to the balcony from a lorry in the street and they were ready to pull the house down. As more and more supporters descended on Hume Street, they were prevented from carrying out this summary execution and, in any case, they hadn't got a demolition licence. By sheer force of numbers, the Hume Street protesters managed to regain possession of the house and, after a lot of jostling and some nasty incidents, the hired goons eventually withdrew, leaving their 'day's work' unfinished.

The assault on Hume Street took place against a background of political cataclysm. Just a week earlier, Jack Lynch had dismissed Haughey and Blaney from the cabinet and accepted the resignation of Kevin Boland. The Republic was in the throes of the Arms Crisis and, in a strange way, this would lead to a resolution of the Hume Street debacle. Hundreds of people had now joined the protest, defending the threatened house from within and without, with many of them sleeping on the pavement. At one point, some shady characters whose identity is still unknown offered guns to the leaders of the occupation in case they might have to protect themselves. George Colley had just succeeded Haughey as Minister of Finance, and the conservationists were in almost constant contact with his office in an effort to find some formula to end the conflict. He was told about the guns offer and it was this, more than anything else, that galvanised him to take decisive action. On Tuesday night, less than three days

after the K-Security assault, he called in representatives of An Taisce, the RIAI and the Dublin Civic Group and, following a separate meeting with Sam Stephenson and John Corcoran, he announced that agreement had been reached. There would be no further attempts to demolish the Hume Street houses at least until the Green Property Company had obtained a new planning permission for office blocks with facades 'in a style that will maintain as far as possible the existing quality and character of the streetscape'. For developers and conservationists alike, it was an historic *entente* even if it wasn't particularly *cordiale*.

A year later, the two state properties at the corner of Hume Street were sold at auction for £86,000 and, to nobody's surprise, the successful bidder was the Green Property Company. After demolishing these houses as well as the others they already owned, the company built fake Georgian office blocks on both sides of the entrance to Hume Street. Unfortunately, the fakery is all too apparent in the chocolate-coloured brickwork, the heavy pitched roofs and the architects' lack of attention to the subtle nuances of Georgian detailing. But then, Sam Stephenson's heart just wasn't in it. For its own part, the state didn't take a single square foot of space in the new blocks when they were completed in 1973. After all the years of bitter controversy, that would have been almost grotesque. But John Corcoran had no trouble finding private sector tenants eager to take the total of 90,000 square feet off his hands – and he broke all previous records by achieving a stupendous rent of £3.50 per square foot. Two of the four blocks were then sold to New Ireland Assurance, while the other two were acquired by the Guinness and Aer Lingus pension funds. Corcoran had finally made his killing on the Green.

But there were long-term implications to dressing up modern office space in Georgian clothing, and these were clearly seen at the time by Sam Stephenson. Writing in *Hibernia* just ten days before the Colley settlement, he warned that this kind of 'misguided Solomon's judgment' would create a dangerous precedent for the city. 'Accept this as the reasonable way to redevelop Georgian Dublin and, within ten years, there won't be a genuine Georgian building in the

city', he declared. 'The city would present a shining neo-Georgian face to the world, but that face would be as fake as a three-pound note.' He had a point. After all, the original Georgian houses framing the entrance to Hume Street *were* demolished and, to that extent, the conservationists failed to achieve their primary objective. And by pressing for a pastiche solution in a last-ditch effort to save the streetscape, they unwittingly opened the floodgates to a tide of similar developments elsewhere. Stephenson's nightmare vision of Georgian Dublin as a huge Hollywood set may not have been fully realised, but the city is heading in that direction.

The face-saving formula devised for Hume Street provided developers with a stunningly effective weapon in their ceaseless attack on the fabric of the city. In future, they would be able to tear down dozens of Georgian houses, including many officially listed for protection, simply by agreeing to replace them with 'Georgian replica' office blocks. And though these buildings were as bogus as the 'villages' Potemkin built for Catherine the Great, Dublin Corporation and the mainstream preservation groups willingly, even enthusiastically, gave their imprimatur to this new game of illusion. Now you see it, now you don't; now you see it again . . . well, sort of.

Harcourt Street and Lower Leeson Street became particular casualties of this blinkered two-dimensional approach. In both cases, the original houses were generally built on long, narrow plots. Thus, if a developer managed to buy up three or four houses, he had a ready-made site for a good-size office development, even allowing for the Corporation's maximum two-to-one plot ratio. In 1969, for example, Irish Life acquired the Standard Hotel in Harcourt Street, an amalgamation of four Georgian houses, and then sought planning permission for a pre-cast concrete office block on the site. Conservationists argued strongly that the original buildings should be retained, with the new office block being built in the rear gardens, but this wouldn't have satisfied the developers' craving to maximise the value of the site. Shortly after the Hume Street deal, their architects, Lardner and Partners, produced a 'compromise' solution. The front of the T-shaped office block would be done in a Georgian style while the pre-cast treatment would be confined to the rear.

And though the 'Georgian' facade was indescribably inept, the conservationists fell for it and Harcourt House, with its 31,000 square feet of office space, was completed in 1972. Eleven years later, Irish Life discovered that the pre-cast units on the rear block were defective and they were all replaced, at enormous expense, with brick-cladding. Needless to say, the 'Georgian' front put up to please the preservationists didn't require any surgery at all.

Harcourt House was supposed to be a 'special case', but that's not the way things have turned out. It was followed by a rash of similar developments in the immediate vicinity, all involving the replacement of original Georgian houses with 'replica' office blocks. Thus, in the same terrace, three more office blocks have been built and twelve of the twenty-five original houses are now fakes. A similar trend has been evident in Lower Leeson Street, where the Marist Fathers were the first to cash in on the Hume Street stratagem. In 1971, they got planning permission for a 'replica' Georgian office development on the site of three of the seven houses occupied by the Catholic University School. Immediately afterwards, they sold the property for about £100,000 to a British developer called Chown Securities. In place of the three houses, they built a fairly decent 'Georgian' office block and, naturally, this was copied by other developers in the supposedly-protected Leeson Street/Hatch Street area.

More alarmingly, the whole terrace of Georgian houses on St Stephen's Green occupied for over a century by St Vincent's Hospital might have gone the same way but for another last-minute deal between conservationists and developers. After moving out to Elm Park, the Sisters of Charity sold the 1½-acre hospital site in May 1972 to the British-owned Lyon Group, whose Irish board of directors included Sean Lemass. He had joined the board immediately on resigning as Taoiseach and was chairman when he died in 1971. The price Lyon paid for St Vincent's, at £1.5 million, broke all previous records in the Republic. Despite the fact that the five houses included in the package were listed for preservation, Lyon got outline planning permission to demolish the lot and build a massive office block on the site. This decision was made by Bobby Molloy just days before he left office in March 1973.

Fortunately, the Lyon Group did not go ahead with their Molloy-sanctioned plans. Dreading a repetition of the Hume Street debacle, they held talks with An Taisce and the Dublin Civic Group, and this led to the appointment of John Costello as consultant architect with a brief to restore the two most important houses and replace the other three with historically-faithful replicas. Much of the work involved removing additions made by the Sisters of Charity over the years, especially to No. 56, once the Earl of Meath's town house. Yet this splendid building, with its magnificent stairwell and stunning rococo plasterwork by Robert West, would have been swept away if Bobby Molloy's permission had been implemented. Indeed, apart from the painstaking restoration work, the Lyon development is a very pedestrian affair – notable only because it was called Sean Lemass House. But like the switching of bodies in the Kremlin Wall, even this act of homage to the company's former chairman didn't last long, as we shall see later.

The collapse of the property market in 1974 forced the Lyon Group into liquidation and Sean Lemass House had to be completed by their bankers, Keyser Ullman. And in the subsequent division of the spoils, the group's Irish subsidiary, rich in serviced industrial land, was picked up by the Green Property Company. John Corcoran had been getting on with the business he knew best, property development and speculation. After completing the Hume Street scheme and a major shopping centre at Coolock, the Green group acquired two solid Victorian houses in Earlsfort Terrace, one of which had served for many years as the headquarters of the Labour Party, and replaced both of them with a mediocre office block called Seagrave House. The architects in this case were not Stephenson and Gibney, but Group Design, and Corcoran seems to have been well pleased with their efforts because he still has his own office in the building.

In 1972, the Green Property Company bought the former McGrath's tea warehouse on Bachelors Walk, opposite the Halfpenny Bridge, apparently with the intention of developing the site for offices and shops. However, despite the fact that full planning permission was granted on three separate occasions between 1973 and 1978, Corcoran and his cohorts

failed to proceed with any development there. Then, having demolished the old buildings, they sold this derelict site in 1981 to Dan Healy, formerly of Healy Homes, for almost £1 million – a fat return for nine years of doing nothing. Healy later obtained a new planning permission for an appalling five-storey office block but, by then, the property market had collapsed yet again and the Bachelors Walk site has since been used as a makeshift surface car park. Corcoran had got out while the going was good, leaving poor Dan Healy to shepherd a highly-marginal property through the depths of the worst-ever property recession. In 1982, the suave ex-bookie emerged as one of the undertakers of the Royal Hibernian Hotel in Dawson Street. The much-loved Hibernian had played a central role in Dublin's social scene for more than a century and a half, but history counted for nothing with its last and least sentimental owners, Trust House Forte. When the Hibernian and their second city centre hotel, the equally grand Shelbourne, started losing money, hard-headed THF bosses in London decided that one or other would have to go. It was almost a toss-up, but what decided the issue was that the Shelbourne was listed for preservation while the Hibernian was not. In January 1982, THF sold the Dawson Street property as a development site for just over £4 million and then spent the proceeds on a sumptuous refurbishment of the Shelbourne. The purchasers were Duke House Properties, a consortium formed by John Corcoran, the Development Capital Corporation and Robert Neill, a thrusting young chartered surveyor, who had been working for estate agents Keane Mahony Smith. Within months, Duke House had sold out to Friends Provident, though they were retained as project managers for the large-scale office, shopping and residential development being planned for the site. This scheme, designed by Costello Murray and Beaumont, got planning permission in April 1984 and the old hotel, which had been extensively renovated only four years earlier, was demolished not long afterwards. Only the coved ceiling of the staircase hall was salvaged from the wreckage.

Meanwhile, John Corcoran had accumulated enough wealth to buy a stud farm near Dunboyne where he now lives in a pretentious 'Georgian' villa every bit as phoney as the office blocks he built around Hume Street.

Seven

'In the old days you could shoot a decent old landlord like Lord Leitrim, but you can't shoot Salix.'

Harry Hyams was a legend in his own time. He wasn't a rock star or a football hero or even a television personality. He was a property speculator, the sort of person who might be expected to keep the lowest of low profiles. But poor Harry was thrust into the public arena because his name had become inextricably associated with Centrepoint, the most notorious office block ever built.

Harry Hyams built Centrepoint. Thirty-four storeys high, it had the distinction of being the tallest building in London when it was finished in 1965. But it wasn't the height that shocked people. No, what made Centrepoint so notorious was the fact that the entire building, bar the ground-floor, was left vacant for over ten years. People were even more shocked when it became apparent that this caused Harry Hyams no pain. Indeed, because of the bizarre economics of office development, it just made him richer and richer.

Harry's scam worked like this. Centrepoint, like every other office block, has a capital value. This value is based on a multiple of the annual rental, not on what it cost to build. Even if a building is vacant, its capital value can be calculated on the rent it would be *likely* to achieve in any given year. At a time of rapid inflation, office rents are galloping ahead as fast as everything else and often much faster. Therefore, it doesn't pay to fill a block with tenants because that would mean fixing the rent for five to seven years, depending on the review period. And if the rental level is fixed, the capital value remains static – at least until the next rent review. In

this scenario, it actually makes sense to leave an office block empty for as long as possible.

Centrepoint cost about £5 million to build in 1964/65. By 1970, its capital value had shot up to £22 million – precisely because it was still vacant. This was no mere paper figure. Indeed, the fact that Centrepoint was appreciating in value year after year meant that Harry Hyams was able to mortgage and re-mortgage the building several times over to raise long-term loans at low interest rates to finance similar schemes elsewhere. In 1960, his Oldham Estates Company – in which George Wimpey, the largest contractors in Europe, had a substantial stake – was worth £22,000. Just ten years later, the company was valued at a staggering £96 million.

Ironically, Harry Hyams was helped to this fortune by – of all people – the British Labour Party. In 1964, after Harold Wilson first came to power, the new Labour government clamped down on further large-scale office development in central London. Naturally, this led to a shortage in the supply of 'prime' office space, pushing up rents and greatly inflating the value of the office blocks already built. But Labour's ban also had another, equally important side effect. It encouraged property developers to look for opportunities in 'provincial' cities like Birmingham and Manchester. Inevitably, many of them were drawn across the Irish Sea by the sheer magnetism of Dublin. It was boomtown, and they were the rats.

At the time, the Republic provided an almost ideal setting for property speculation. The economy was expanding, the Fianna Fáil government was firmly committed to 'free enterprise' and the rewards for those who made a killing were much higher than on the 'mainland'. Significantly, these rewards were not subject to such 'socialist' impositions as capital gains tax. And, of course, the state itself was underwriting the entire market by leasing acre after acre of office space at rental levels often much higher than anywhere else outside London. No wonder the cross-channel speculators flooded into Dublin where, as *Plan* magazine said, 'a patriotic government was allowing them to make a quarry out of the city'. As site values soared from £1 per square yard to £10 per square foot, the dry crisp sound in the background was

of auctioneers and land speculators rubbing their hands in glee.

Harry Hyams surfaced in Dublin in 1966. Like so many other speculators, both home-grown and cross-channel, he hired Haughey Boland and Company to look after his affairs. They set up Montrose Investments, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Oldham Estates, with Hyams himself as the principal director. The company soon acquired a site on Harcourt Road, part of the old Harcourt Street railway embankment, and commissioned Michael Scott and Partners to draw up plans for a fourteen-storey office block. Since this would have been almost five times the height of other buildings in the vicinity, the Corporation refused permission – although approval was granted later for an eight-storey block. Because of the recession, work didn't start on Montrose House until late 1979 and it wasn't completed until mid 1981. Since then, however, all 65,000 square feet of space has been vacant – though the whole building is ostensibly available for letting, through Lisney's, to a 'single tenant'. This is exactly the same condition that Hyams attached to Centrepoint and when no 'single tenant' came forward, the block was left vacant. But unlike Centrepoint, Montrose House is just another of Dublin's many empty office blocks and, as such, it can't be much of an asset to Harry's empire.

Hyams fared rather better with his other venture here, which also had its roots in the mid-1960s. For it was Harry and his Wimpey allies who prepared the ground for the Bank of Ireland in Lower Baggot Street. They were the cross-channel speculators lurking behind Hummingbird Ltd, a charmingly-named £2 company set up by merchant bankers Guinness and Mahon. The directors included Eton-educated John Henry Guinness, the bank's chairman, and his colleague, Sir George Mahon, who also figured as a founder member of the Irish Georgian Society. But the true identity of the company's shareholders was kept under wraps by alloting the two £1 shares to Mars Nominess, a vehicle specifically retained by the bank for that purpose. This clever device was a cause of great frustration to anyone trying to take on a speculative developer because they could never find out who their enemy really was. Checking files in the Companies Office at Dublin

Castle often yielded nothing more than a string of short-hand typists and solicitors' clerks in a maze of interlocking companies. Indeed, this whole miasma of deception is probably best summed up by the wonderfully-inventive name of another property vehicle in the Guinness and Mahon stable. It's called Enigma Variations Ltd.

It was in 1966 that Hummingbird acquired the former Lincoln and Nolan car works in Lower Baggot Street and hired Michael Scott and Partners to draw up plans for a twin-slab fourteen-storey office development on the site. This scheme was even more audacious than an earlier proposal prepared for Lincoln and Nolan by Desmond FitzGerald and approved by the Corporation in 1962. In an effort to limit its overpowering effect on what was still a sensitive Georgian area, the planners decreed that Hummingbird's scheme must be scaled down. The block fronting Lower Baggot Street would be reduced to five storeys, while the larger block at the rear would be held to a maximum height of eight storeys.

However, before the proposed development could get off the ground, Hummingbird had to deal with a slight problem. Part of the company's site covered a terrace of old three-storey houses on East James Street and these were occupied by nine families, some of whom had lived there for more than fifty years. In true Dick Turpin style, Hummingbird ordered them to 'quit and deliver' their homes. Under the Rent Restrictions Act, a Fianna Fáil measure passed in 1960, landlords could evict their tenants if they could show that this was required for 'good estate management'. They didn't even have to pay compensation and the responsibility for rehousing the dispossessed conveniently fell on the local authority. But Hummingbird's tenants were not going to go without a fight and, backed by the Dublin Housing Action Committee, they picketed Castleknock Lodge, Sir George Mahon's palatial home, to draw public attention to their plight. Largely as a result of this embarrassing agitation, the nine families involved were given alternative accommodation in Gardiner Street, on the northside, and they also received some compensation. In April 1968, as each family moved out, they got the princely sum of £275. A few weeks later, Hummingbird sold its 1½-acre site in Lower Baggot Street to

the Bank of Ireland for well over £1 million. It was a graphic illustration of the value of property and the worthlessness of people.

The bank had been scouting around town for a suitable site on which to build a 'prestige' headquarters. After the formation of the Bank of Ireland Group in 1966, in which the Bank of Ireland absorbed the National Bank and the Hibernian Bank, the old Parliament House in College Green was clearly too small to accommodate the serried ranks of senior management. For a time, offices were rented in Hume House, Ballsbridge, but this was no more than a temporary arrangement. Early in 1968, the bank's governors decided to build a new headquarters and a number of potential sites were inspected before they finally settled on Lower Baggot Street. The site assembled by Hummingbird had several advantages. It was large and prominently located in a 'prime' area of the city. It was also 'ready to go'. Some four years of work had gone into putting the parcel together, planning problems had been ironed out and the sordid business of getting rid of tenants had just been completed. And to make the transition even smoother, the Bank of Ireland retained Hummingbird's architects, Michael Scott and Partners, and made Wimpey's the main contractors.

The Lower Baggot Street scheme was no longer a speculative development. The office blocks were now being built by the Bank of Ireland for its own use. Thus, the specifications were raised to a level far above what a spec developer would have settled for. Under the direction of Ronnie Tallon, a rigorous disciple of Mies van der Rohe, the whole scheme was redesigned. This was not at all surprising since, as *Plan* noted at the time, Tallon had almost become 'the living interpreter of the late Herr van der Rohe'. The facade treatment became almost a carbon-copy of his guru's most famous work, the Seagram Building in New York. No less than five hundred tons of Delta manganese bronze went into the creation of the curtain-walling, and this alone cost £1.25 million. Indeed, so much bronze was used that it had an effect on the world market for the metal. And when the project was completed in 1972, architects came from far and wide to see the bank's new headquarters. It was the largest bronze-walled building

in Europe and, at £4.6 million, the most expensive office complex yet built in Ireland.

Not everyone was impressed by what they saw. 'Is it a car radiator grille, or is it a building?' asked the *Architectural Review* in its scathing critique. 'The architects, Michael Scott and Partners, seem to have resorted to every imaginable cliché of the particular modern school favoured by that office – the inevitable double re-entrant corners, the inevitable bronze cladding, the inevitable tinted glazing and, presumably, the inevitable air conditioning to go with it. The whole concept seems anti-ecological; a banal missue of beautiful materials in a plan form that is itself banal. Will architects, or the searchers after status symbols, ever move on from the glass-enclosed reception area, violently wasteful of space and housing nothing more usually than a colourless little dolly girl at a desk? Or the acreages of acoustic tiles, flush-fitting flourescents, carefully-positioned downlighters and the cliché-ridden efforts at landscaping with its inevitable use of the silver birch and the limestone set?'

Much more serious, however, was the real violence done to Lower Baggot Street. By its sheer mass and bulk, the bank's head office destroyed the essential unity of a once fine Georgian street – more aggressively even than the ESB, just around the corner. 'No doubt an awful lot of sweat and aesthetics went into the exact proportioning of the mullion bars', said *Plan*. 'But what the public will appreciate about this building is the murderous assault on the chimneyed skyline of all the adjoining streets'. Even the hard-landscaped 'amenity open space' in front of the building was seen as 'an insincere attempt to recompense the public for something robbed from them'. *Plan* posed the question: 'Will the ordinary public be allowed to use it in the sort of way they might like; a beat group concert, hippies munching sandwiches, kids on scooters, a Sinn Féin meeting, the successors of Paddy Kavanagh and Brendan Behan strolling about?' Of course, it hasn't worked out like that. Even if any or all of these people were welcome, who in their right mind would want to make use of this hostile, windswept piazza. About the only plus for the city is that the bank allows its reception area to be used infrequently for art exhibitions.

For the Bank of Ireland, the only thing that spoiled its piazza was the existence of a terrace of six Georgian houses right alongside. And so, before the first two of its office blocks were completed, the bank was already laying plans for a third on the site of these houses even though they were officially listed for protection. While agents secretly acting for the bank badgered the owners to sell out, a planning application was submitted to the Corporation in the name of Salix Trust Ltd, the bank's property holding company. 'In the old days you could shoot a decent old landlord like Lord Leitrim, but you can't shoot Salix', *Plan* moaned. Phil Ryan, who owned a pub at the corner of the terrace was told to accept an offer of £50,000 'or we proceed without you' (he eventually got £120,000; tenants with flats in the threatened houses had to settle for around £250 apiece).

By early 1972, the whole terrace had been acquired by the bank and the houses were left vacant in the expectation that permission would be granted for the office development. When the Corporation turned down the scheme, mainly because the terrace was listed for protection, the bank appealed to the Minister and an oral hearing was held in the Custom House on 8 November 1972. Deirdre Kelly, veteran of Hume Street and founder of the Living City Group, and Uinseann MacEoin came along to support the Corporation and to argue for the retention of the houses, However, for them, the hearing left a lot to be desired. Before it began, the inspector, Chris Dardis – who subsequently became chief civic and amenities architect of Dublin Corporation – spent ten minutes chatting with representatives of the bank, admiring Ronnie Tallon's drawings and passing comments like 'how lovely', 'very good' and 'how nice'. Then, the formal hearing got under way. The whole business lasted no more than seventy minutes, and the bulk of the time was taken up by Tallon's lengthy case for the merits of his design. Dardis evinced little interest in the counter-arguments put forward by Uinseann MacEoin and he almost terminated the proceedings without having heard Deirdre Kelly's submission. She made a strong case for the retention of the six houses as living accommodation. Dardis took no notes of what she had to say. When she had finished, he closed the hearing.

On 1 February 1973, just days before the dissolution of the Dáil, Bobby Molloy granted outline permission for the bank's scheme. As far as Deirdre Kelly was concerned, it was just another example of big business getting its way at the expense of the city. Because of the way the oral hearing had been conducted, she decided to take legal proceedings against the Minister and the bank. She also demanded a copy of the report drawn up by Dardis (normally, inspectors' reports are confidential) and, when this was produced, she considered it to be laced with prejudice, inaccuracies and misstatements of fact.

In her High Court summons, Deirdre Kelly sought an injunction setting aside Bobby Molloy's decision as 'null and void' and restraining the Bank of Ireland from demolishing the terrace of houses until a 'due and proper' oral hearing had been held. Just two days before the writ was issued on 26 March, the bank hired a demolition crew and gave them £30,000 to 'shift these houses within a week', as one of the workers told *Plan* magazine. They started quietly enough by gutting the interiors and then, on Sunday morning at 5 a.m., a ball and chain was brought in to finish the job. By late evening on April Fool's Day, there was nothing left of the terrace but a heap of rubble behind stunted ground-floor walls. The bank had won the day, and Deirdre Kelly's High Court action became pointless. It was not until three years later that work started on the third block and, when this was finally completed in 1977, the Bank of Ireland had an office complex of over 200,000 square feet on a two-acre site formerly occupied by around eighty homes. To make up for this loss of housing, the bank made a contribution of £1,800 to Dublin Corporation. The office complex is now owned by the Bank of Ireland pension fund. It is worth about £40 million.

While the bank was creating this great asset for itself, another sordid little saga was being played out further down the street. In the early hours of 13 July 1973, two nurses sleeping in a flat in No. 11 Lower Baggot Street narrowly escaped death when the side and back walls of the building fell down. The collapse was directly precipitated by the demolition some days earlier of three adjoining buildings to

make way for an office block. Nominally, the development was being carried out by a company called Acres Ltd, but this was merely another of the many masks of Ernest Ottewell, a shadowy figure who became heavily involved in the Dublin property jungle during the early 1970s. Like Harry Hyams, he came over here from England though, by comparison, he was very much in the grub-street league. Apparently, he lived in a remote castle in Leicestershire and, while in Dublin, he took up residence in the remaining wing of burnt-out Hollybrook House, near Bray.

Acres Ltd had demolished Nos. 8-10 Lower Baggot Street, formerly the premises of Fletcher and Philipson, under the guise of carrying out 'alterations'. When work continued on what was clearly an illegal new development, Deirdre Kelly protested on several occasions to the Corporation but, as usual, its enforcement officials failed to take any action. This was not entirely unconnected with the fact that the Corporation itself had plans for this stretch of Lower Baggot Street; its engineers wanted to sweep away the whole terrace between the Acres site and the corner of Upper Merrion Street – including Doheny and Nesbitt's pub – so that the road could be widened by some fifteen feet. Thus, when Acres eventually sought permission for what they were doing, their application was accompanied by an offer to cede to the Corporation free of charge the piece of ground it needed for part of the road-widening scheme. Deirdre Kelly, a fierce opponent of the road engineers and their destructive plans, strongly objected. However, the Corporation was not going to allow her to get in the way. Normally, it takes the planners two months to adjudicate on any planning application, but the decision on the Acres plan was made in just three weeks – and the planners conveniently neglected to notify objectors until it was too late for them to lodge an appeal. It was a scandalous sleight-of-hand operation, the sort of subterfuge one has come to expect from the Corporation when its engineers are determined to have their way with the city.

Thus, to satisfy the Corporation's insatiable demands for more road space, Ottewell built his office block on the set-back line laid down by the engineers, which is why there there is such an awkward corner where it meets the adjoining build-

ing. After completion in 1975, the ground-floor of the block was let to Burgerland and the whole building was later acquied by Joe Walsh Tours (the *Sunday Tribune* is their most notable tenant). In the same year, Ottewell's East Midland Investment Company built another office block with ground-floor retail units on the site of the Blackrock Tailoring Company in Chatham Street. This cheap curtain-walled building was designed by Brian O'Halloran, Desmond FitzGerald's son-in-law, who was known around town as 'The Body' because he looked somewhat like a male model. He was also the architect of an even more lacklustre office block in Thomas Street, which was completed in 1973 and let to the Eastern Health Board.

The Chatham Street block was sold later to the PMPA but, by then, Ernest Ottewell was in deep trouble. The first blow was struck by a seventy-year-old woman, whose flat in Lower Baggot Street had been rendered uninhabitable by the Acres development next door. In July 1975, two years after the near-fatal collapse, she got a High Court judgment for £17,500 against Ottewell's company and, when this sum wasn't paid up, Acres Ltd was forced into receivership to satisfy the claim. Then the architect of the Baggot Street block, Jack Collins, won two judgments for a total of over £31,000 in unpaid fees, and this debt was eventually settled in a most unusual way by Collins taking over a house Ottewell owned in Burlington Road.

The eccentric speculator was well on his way to becoming the most sued man in Ireland when the Collector-General won a judgment against him for £103,000 in unpaid taxes. By then, however, the cupboard was bare. The Northern Bank Finance Corporation had already got judgments both here and in England for £156,000 on foot of a mortgage on Nos. 13-17 Pembroke Road, which Ottewell had acquired through Montague Holdings in 1974. This company was set up two years earlier by solicitors T. G. McVeagh and Co, who earned quite a reputation for serving the interests of property speculators, and its directors included Paul Smithwick and Donald Pratt, both of whom were partners in McVeagh's. They held a 20 per cent stake in Montague Holdings and the rest was owned by anonymous clients of McVeagh's, at least

until Ottewell and East Midlands took over the company with the aid of the NBFC.

Montague Holdings' only assets were the three Regency-style houses in Pembroke Road, which had served for many years as the Cascia Nursing Home. The property had been bought from John Costelloe, owner of the Royal Dublin Hotel, after he had failed to get planning permission for a major hotel development in 1971. Ottewell was planning to build two four-storey blocks of flats on the site but, as a result of strong pressure from the local residents' association, he only managed to get approval to convert the existing houses into apartments. Then, in February 1977, East Midlands – Ottewell's principal vehicle – was forced into liquidation by creditors who were owed a total of £700,000. Not long before that, Ottewell had tried to raise some money by issuing a writ against McVeagh's, claiming damages of over £300,000 in connection with their alleged conflict of interest in the Pembroke Road deal. The action was never pursued.

By that stage, the three listed Regency houses had been allowed to sink into a state of dilapidation. The last few residents had hung on until 1976 when Montague Holdings cut off the electricity supply and refused to accept any further rent payments. After they left, the lead was stripped off the roofs and the property was left open to vandals. In August 1978, the three houses were seriously damaged by a mystery fire and Dublin Corporation had to issue a dangerous buildings order requiring their demolition to first-floor level. This was ignored – even demolition costs money – and, in April 1980, a crowd of itinerants with half-a-dozen caravans moved onto the site, burning woodwork and other materials from the boarded-up houses to keep themselves warm. As soon as they were installed, three workmen arrived to dig a moat-like trench across the front of the site, apparently to ensure that they remained there. It was clear, as *Hibernia* reported at the time, that the itinerants were being used as pawns in an effort to grind down local opposition to the redevelopment of the property. And, sure enough, Pembroke Road residents began flooding their TDs and councillors with complaints about the unedifying encampment in their midst.

The Corporation responded by renewing the dangerous

buildings order, which was served on the new owner of the site, motor racing enthusiast José Kelly, of Bray, Co. Wicklow, and the three houses were eventually demolished late in 1980. The itinerants moved on and Kelly then sold the site to Co. Kildare builders McDermott and Headon for an estimated £250,000 – more than seven times the price it had been bought for in 1970. Thus, throughout all the years of plunder and pillage, the property just kept on appreciating in value, yielding a substantial rake-off to the shameless speculators involved at every point along the line. But when the new owners got Chandler Lavin Associates to produce a finely-detailed Regency facsimile of the original houses, the increasingly stroppy residents association threw a spanner in the works by lodging an appeal. A most ill-advised move, this merely had the effect of postponing the project for another year or more, jeopardising its economic viability at a time of deep recession in the building industry. The residents, driven demented by years of depredation, had lost all sense of proportion.

There were shorter and sharper ways of getting rid of listed buildings, as Arkandew Ltd proved just a few doors down the street. In January 1982, the company sought permission to demolish and reconstruct Nos. 23-25 Pembroke Road. Both houses were listed for protection and, as always, the key question turned on whether they were structurally sound. Thus, the Corporation requested 'a detailed report, certified by a qualified structural engineer, on the stability and general condition of the two houses'. Ten days later, Arkandew submitted a three-page report which, not surprisingly, condemned the buildings. The report was drawn up by Anglin Clarke and Associates, consulting engineers. It was personally signed by the firm's principal, Sean Anglin. Anglin, indeed, was a consulting engineer. But what the Corporation didn't know was that he was also a busy developer and, more specifically, the man behind Arkandew Ltd. Based on the structural report, which Anglin had effectively 'commissioned' from himself, the planners granted permission to reconstruct the houses as flats, but subject to one important condition: that 'the entire front facade of the existing buildings shall be retained'.

Six months later, having tried and failed to get approval to

knock down the facade, Arkandew brought in a demolition crew. Cathal O'Neill, professor of architecture at UCD and long-time resident of Pembroke Road, spotted them starting work one Saturday morning and immediately alerted the Corporation. An inspector came out to investigate, but he went off after being assured that they were 'only demolishing an annexe'. As soon as he was gone, the demolition men resumed their work and, by Monday morning, there was nothing left of the two listed houses but a heap of rubble. Two months later, crying over spilt milk, the Corporation got a High Court injunction restraining Arkandew and Anglin from carrying out any unauthorised development on the site. Finally, the planners granted permission for an apartments scheme, conditional on the front facade being a 'strict facsimile' of the original buildings. As built, however, it is nothing of the sort. The new front elevation is a total farrago. It doesn't even conform with the drawings submitted by Anglin's 'architect', Jerome Roseingrave, a barrister and engineer with no architectural qualifications. However, although the Dublin branch of An Taisce detailed no less than sixteen significant deviations from the original elevation, the lily livered Corporation pointedly refused to take any action. In cases like this, the planners behave like brass monkeys. They see, hear and speak no evil. Little wonder then that the planning laws are held in such contempt.

But let us return to the banks, who so willingly provide the wherewithal for property speculation. While the Bank of Ireland was engaged in the first stage of its brutal assault on Lower Baggot Street, its principal rivals, Allied Irish Banks, were already laying plans for a new group headquarters. AIB had grown out of the merger in 1966 of the Munster and Leinster, Royal and Provincial banks. At first, their thoughts turned to the possibility of redeveloping the triangle formed by Fleet Street, Westmoreland Street and College Street, where the new banking group already had a substantial foothold through the impressive Victorian head office of the old Provincial Bank. This led to a remorseless programme of property acquisition. The most notable casualty of all this was the Pearl Bar on Fleet Street, a favourite with staff of the *Irish Times*, which was purchased in February 1973 for

£110,000 and immediately closed down. Earlier, around 1966, the bank bought the old head office of the Workers Union of Ireland in College Street and this historic building, once the base of fiery Jim Larkin, was left vacant for eighteen years before being demolished late in 1984. AIB also took over the cupola-topped Pearl Insurance building on the corner of Fleet Street and Westmoreland Street and, with reckless abandon, this prominently-located property was also left empty for several years. Other buildings nearby suffered a similar fate. Meanwhile, the mandarins of AIB had decided that they wouldn't after all be building their new headquarters here, mainly because this 'tight' centre city site couldn't have provided anything like enough parking spaces for their cars.

The AIB men were in an expansive mood and, in March 1972, they bought the eleven-acre Carmelite Convent site in Ranelagh, which for more than a century had represented the whole world for an order of strictly-enclosed nuns. There, the bank would build its temple of mammon or, better still, the property could be traded for a more suitable site closer to the city centre. Not long afterwards, however, AIB solved all of its problems at a stroke by acquiring a first-class site in Ballsbridge – the Royal Dublin Society's bloodstock sales paddocks. And the price it paid for this thirteen-acre holding, in March 1973, was £4.3 million – almost as much as the Bank of Ireland spent on building the first stage of its expensive headquarters. The deal was an unexpected bonanza for the RDS; it enabled the cash-starved society to purchase the former Masonic girls school, since renamed Thomas Prior House, thus consolidating its presence in Ballsbridge, hopefully for the forseeable future.

Having found its Holy Grail, AIB immediately set about planning a vast office complex for the former RDS paddocks. Fortunately, the acreage was extensive enough to allow for the erection of low-rise buildings which would not disrupt the environmental character of the area. Under the direction of Andrew Devane, of Robinson Keefe and Devane, a 'campus-style' layout was evolved, consisting of eight inter-linked office blocks no more than five storeys high in an attractively-landscaped setting. In deference to the residential zoning of the immediate area, Dublin Corporation insisted on the pro-

vision of ninety flats when it granted permission for the scheme in September 1974. Of course, the bank had no interest whatever in building these 'luxury' apartments, so this element of the project was contracted out to Finbarr Holland, who had them all built and sold off before the offices were formally topped out in June 1977. AIB had made great play of the fact that its new 'Bankcentre' wouldn't be just another dead office complex; there would be a gymnasium, squash courts, a heated swimming pool and even an 'experimental theatre'. None of these goodies were built, however. With single-minded determination, the bankers concentrated all their efforts on providing no less than six acres of office space, which made their Bankcentre the largest single complex of its kind ever built in Ireland.

Not to be out-done, the Ulster and Northern banks also provided themselves with new headquarters, though there was a marked difference in their approach. In 1976, despite appeals from the Dublin Civic Group, the Ulster Bank tore down a whole collection of mainly Victorian buildings in College Green, Church Lane and Suffolk Street, replacing them all with a stone-faced modern office block designed by Boyle and Delaney. The bank was persuaded to retain the facade of its original head office, a high-domed Victorian building with a great arched entrance and the most impressive chimney-stacks in Dublin. But the ornate interior was senselessly destroyed to make way for one of those awful modern 'banking halls', bland and clichéd and instantly forgettable. The rather more conservation-minded Northern Bank did not make the same mistake. Having acquired the Hibernian Bank's Italianate headquarters at the corner of College Green and Church Lane, the Northern built up a six-storey office block behind the robust facade. The magnificent barrel-vaulted banking hall, rich in decorative detail, was painstakingly restored and then shown off to stunning effect with cleverly-concealed lighting. To see it today is to realise the extent of the butchery perpetrated by the Ulster.

Meanwhile, Allied Irish had not forgotten about its valuable site in Ranelagh. This, too, had considerable potential for development, even if it had been passed over as the location for the bank's headquarters. One thing was certain; the bank

was not going to bring back the good old days of the late eighteenth century when the former Carmelite property was the site of the Ranelagh Pleasure Gardens. A decidedly unphilantropic consortium called Grasmere Ltd, jointly controlled by Finbarr Holland and Allied Irish Investment Bank, was set up and plans were laid for a dense residential development of more than 300 flats clustered together in seven-storey blocks – a sort of middle-class Ballymun. And despite intense opposition from local residents, the Corporation eventually granted permission for the scheme after Grasmere offered to set aside less than four acres of their land for a public park. But there was even a price attached to this offer. Finbarr Holland, whose hobbies include driving fast cars and smoking vast Cuban cigars, wanted the park called after himself.

Eight

'The vultures are preying on the community, ready to swoop and put up office blocks against the rights of the people. Intimidation is happening. A woman in Mount Street comes to me trembling with fear every week saying, "I am being pushed out, bullied out of the area." We have a social service centre and free legal advice, but most of the older people feel isolated, intimidated and afraid . . . Power, influence and money are the deciding factors, not people.'

Lower Mount Street used to be a lively place. Architecturally, its terraces of Georgian houses were never more than fair to middling, but at least they provided passable shelter for hundreds of people who were quite happy to live there. Over the past twenty years, however, this thriving inner city community was systematically wiped out so that the street could be remade to suit the interests of property speculators. Variety, the very spice of life, gave way to a monotonous uniformity as three-quarters of the original buildings – over sixty houses in all – were demolished and replaced by 'modern' blocks containing a total of half-a-million square feet of office space. In the process, Lower Mount Street has become the dullest, the dreariest and the deadest major street in Dublin.

It might have been redeemed if the architecture of the new buildings had been exciting, innovative or even different. However, with only one or two exceptions, the office blocks that now line both sides of the street constitute an appalling collection of architectural dross. Nobody, least of all those directly involved, could defend this relentless exercise in banality. Indeed, nobody does. It is a cause of acute shame that such an unparalleled opportunity to rebuild an important street in the image of the twentieth century has been so wantonly wasted. But instead of frankly confessing their

errors, the architects, the planners and the developers have all climbed on a merry-go-round of buck-passing and recrimination. The architects say the planners kept them in a straitjacket by insisting on Georgian pastiche of one sort or another. The planners claim that there was no alternative because the architects had failed to evolve an appropriate modern idiom. And the developers maintain that the architects had to serve up what the planners wanted because that was the easiest way to get permission. In reality, of course, they all share the blame.

Even if this wasn't fully realised at the time, Lower Mount Street was sacrificed to modern office blocks in order to save the more important Georgian streets and squares. Once it had been zoned for offices, with none of the original buildings listed for preservation, it should have been clear that Lower Mount Street would become a total redevelopment area. It was not, therefore, a question of sensitive infill, with one or two office blocks slotted in between the houses; the whole street was about to be blitzed. But rather than give it up as a lost cause and allow architects to 'do their own thing', the planners insisted that new buildings should 'blend' with the existing streetscape – even though this streetscape was soon to disappear. The tone was set as far back as 1968 when Kevin Boland turned down the first office block scheme for the street on the grounds that it would be 'out of harmony with the architectural appearance of existing buildings in the vicinity'. Presumably at the instigation of his own planning advisers, Boland suggested that a 'design pattern' should be established for all future development 'on both sides of this important street'. This led to the adoption by the Corporation of a pattern-book approach to the redevelopment of the area. Although it may have been reasonable for them to insist on the retention of existing parapet lines, they went much further than that. Brick was in and pre-cast concrete or steel and glass were out. More ludicrously, they ruled that the proportions of the new office blocks would have to relate in some way to the Georgian idiom.

Prizebond House, one of the worst modern buildings in Dublin, was the first product of this aesthetic compromise. It was one of the buildings churned out by M. W. Design's

plan factory in Cheshire and the developer was an inscrutable company called Griffin Finance and Investments, which gave as its address a post office box number in Hong Kong. The block is distinguished by its dull brown brick (approved by the Corporation), up-and-down aluminium sash windows mocking the Georgian style, and a prison-like ground-floor car par fronted by concrete mullion bars. Completed in 1970, it was profitably let to the state and then sold on to Friends Provident. Among the tenants, appropriately enough, is the planning division of the Department of the Environment.

The block stands on the site of a terrace of nine houses which had been part of the Pembroke Estate. According to local people, the property was inherited by a young relative of Lord Pembroke, Neil Verschoyle, who was in the Soviet Union at the time. An avowed communist, he returned briefly to Dublin and proclaimed that he wanted nothing to do with the Mount Street property; it was his wish that the houses should be given to the plain people of the area. One way or the other, the terrace fell into the hands of Duncairn Estates, one of several property companies controlled by solicitor Gordon Maurice Greene, a senior partner in Margetson and Greene, of Baggot Street. Pleading 'good estate management', Duncairn got court approval in 1967 to evict at least two dozen tenants – including a number of families – from the houses. And before their case was taken up by the Dublin Housing Action Committee, most of them had taken flight with a few hundred pounds in compensation but without any offer of alternative accommodation. Then, as soon as it had vacant possession, Greene's company did a deal with cross-channel developers Trollope and Colls, who demolished the houses and later sold the cleared site to Griffin Finance.

Greene also popped up in Ballsbridge where, in 1966, he bought up Turner's Cottages, near the corner of Shelbourne Road. Again through Duncairn Estates, he got rid of the tenants and then tried to persuade the Corporation to grant permission for a five-storey office block on the site. In 1970, with a whiff of capital gains tax in the air, Greene moved his operation off-shore by vesting ownership of the property in a company called O'Connell Investments (C.I.) Ltd, registered

in Jersey. A year later, Bobby Molloy made all his dreams come true by granting approval for the office development. Shortly afterwards, Greene realised a substantial and, presumably, untaxed capital gain when he sold O'Connell Investments (C.I.) Ltd lock, stock and barrel to Dodder Properties. Through the Jersey-based company, they built the office block to a design by Stephenson and Gibney (Greene's architects) and, on completion in 1974, this inelegant concrete structure was let to the state-subsidised Irish Productivity Centre. It is now part of Irish Life's vast property portfolio.

Stephenson and Gibney were closer to the top of their form when they designed Grattan House, one of the few office blocks on Lower Mount Street which could be classified as architecture. But unlike the O'Connell Investments venture, this was not primarily a speculative scheme. It was to be the headquarters of Bord Bainne, the state milk board, who had acquired the site on the corner of Grattan Street from the Holy Ghost nuns of Killeshandra, Co. Cavan. The good sisters had plans for a nursing home to replace the six Georgian houses that once stood there, but this scheme was abandoned following a credit squeeze in 1965. Two years later, the cleared site was sold to Bord Bainne, though it was a mite too large for their needs. Thus, part of the property was parcelled off to Hardwicke and Irish Life, and the task fell on Stephenson and Gibney to design two separate blocks, one for Bord Bainne and the other for speculative letting, while retaining some architectural unity. They succeeded admirably. Indeed, this brick-clad building with its twin entrances is almost a classic example of how well a new development can blend with its surroundings without aping Georgiana. It is marred only by the long-time derelict site right next door, where Hardwicke demolished two houses with the intention of building another office block, though this won't get off the ground until there is some sign of a pick-up in the market. Meanwhile, it generates some revenue as a surface car park, like so many other derelict sites in the city.

Nothing at all can be said in favour of the six-storey office block on the corner of Grattan Street and Grand Canal Street. This vulgar concrete monstrosity, plonked right in front of a

terrace of two-storey houses, was also designed by Stephenson and Gibney. Indeed, the architects and their clients – McInerney Properties – added insult to injury by elevating the block on a podium and providing it with deep recessed tinted windows. This didn't bother the Corporation, however, because planning permission was granted without any hesitation in 1970. And when the block was completed three years later, the letting agent, John Finnegan, employed the sort of guff so favoured by his profession to describe it as 'an excellently-finished and timely development'. Not long afterwards, the entire building was taken off his hands by the ever-reliable OPW to provide office space for the Civil Service Commission and the Department of the Gaeltacht. With this state covenant in the bag, McInerney's made a fat profit by selling the block to Irish Life for over £1 million. More recently, its graffiti-scarred open ground-floor 'arcade' has become a regular venue for night-time cider parties. But this shouldn't unduly worry McInerney's, Irish Life, Stephenson and Gibney or John Finnegan. None of them have to live next door to their 'excellently-finished and timely' creation.

McInerney Properties was the vehicle of Scariff-born brothers Dan, Ambrose and Frank McInerney, who made their fortunes from residential and commercial development in the Dublin area, as well as in Britain, Europe and the Middle East. Apart from the Grand Canal Street block, an 'office park' at Leopardstown and numerous housing estates, their principal legacy to Dublin is Park House, on the North Circular Road, which is one of the biggest single office blocks in the city. This massive and ungainly T-shaped building, designed by Downes Meehan and Robson, stands seven storeys high over a raised basement car park and contains no less than 120,000 square feet of office space. Built on the site of Kirwan House orphanage, it was originally intended to be an hotel and the reinforced concrete structure was almost finished when this decidedly odd idea was abandoned in 1969. McInerney's then sought planning permission to raise the height to eleven storeys and convert the whole lot into an office block. Not surprisingly, the Corporation rejected this outrageous proposal, though Bobby Molloy eventually granted his approval on condition that the height would not exceed

the seven-storey structure already built on the site. The block was completed in 1973 and, after an ill-starred letting programme during which it remained substantially vacant, it was sold to the PMPA for a knock-down price four years later.

Meanwhile, things were moving very fast in and around Lower Mount Street. Very much to the forefront in the race to redevelop the area was Dodder Properties, which had been set up in 1968 by two Mayomen – Westport-born insurance broker Charlie Kenny and civil engineer Enda Kelly, who hailed from Bohola, which has spawned more than its fair share of property developers. Like so many other sons of John Healy's proverbial snipegrass, they had come to Dublin in the 1950s hungry for success and prepared to 'work like hoors' until they achieved it, as Kenny himself would say later. And, naturally, they met up with each other through the Mayomen's Association, the best-organised emigré mafia in the capital. At the time, Kenny was a partner in Matthews Mulcahy and Sutherland, advising clients on property matters, and Kelly had already set up his own building company when they both decided to take the plunge into property development. Their first venture was Shell House, a pre-cast concrete office block in Hatch Street, designed by Burke-Kennedy Doyle and Partners. They got the job primarily because their own office was right next door, and the cute Mayomen feared that they might object to the demolition of the three adjoining Georgian houses. The new block, one of the early 'mistakes' by this otherwise decent practice, was completed in 1969, let to Irish Shell as its headquarters and sold six years later at a vast profit to the Aer Lingus Pension Fund.

Not long after the Shell building was finished, Matthews Mulcahy and Sutherland decided to develop a speculative office block in South Leinster Street, partly for their own use, and Burke-Kennedy Doyle were given the commission to design it. What they produced was the Bowmaker building, a subtle essay in brick and tinted glass, which is among the best examples of infill modern architecture in Dublin. But there was another link between this scheme and the Shell block in Hatch Street: both sites were put together by the legendary Joe McMenamin. A Dubliner for generations back, unlike so many others in the business, McMenamin started

out in the poplin trade as a tie manufacturer before he was bitten by the property bug in the mid 1960s. He had what is described as an incredible 'nose' for property and he used this talent to seek out potential development sites, always in the more salubrious southside areas. Quietly and in great secrecy, his Town Centre Property Company would move into a street and establish a foothold by acquiring one or two Georgian houses, usually at prices far below their redevelopment value. Depending on the size of the site McMenamin was assembling, this might be followed by the arm's length purchase of several adjoining properties through his solicitors, T. G. McVeagh and Co., who were quite adept at handling such sensitive tasks. Then, having secured vacant possession by getting rid of troublesome tenants, McMenamin would flog his 'package' at a large profit to some interested developer – more often than not his friends in Dodder Properties. Indeed, he became so proficient at providing them and others with their raw material that he quickly earned himself the title of 'king of the site assemblers'. But apart from this entirely speculative activity, McMenamin also occupied himself developing supermarkets for the now-defunct Five Star chain as well as shopping centres in Dundrum, Glenageary and Kilbarrack. Interestingly, the 'economic adviser' to his Town Centre Property Company was none other than Garret FitzGerald, then a freelance consultant.

McMenamin was active in Lower Mount Street in 1969 when Dodder Properties first sought outline permission for a massive office development stretching from Prizebond House to the corner of Warrington Place. It was a thoroughly audacious scheme, involving the demolition of fifteen houses occupied at the time by over thirty families, and the Corporation immediately turned it down. On appeal, Kevin Boland took such a jaundiced view of Dodder's plan that he inscribed a note on the file saying that it should *never* get permission. For Charlie Kenny, this was an unexpected slap in the face. After all, his loyalty to Fianna Fáil was well known. Dodder had no option but to try again. In 1971, Bobby Molloy, who had succeeded Boland as Minister, granted permission for the proposed office development without insisting on the provision of some flats in part-replacement for all the doomed dwellings.

Dodder Properties had not been twiddling their thumbs waiting for Molloy's decision to come through. Late in 1969, they snapped up two houses on Adelaide Road and then moved to acquire two adjoining properties, which were owned and occupied by the Irish Farmers Association and the Civil Service Clerical Association. Kenny had no trouble doing a deal with the IFA, but the secretary of the civil service union proved to be a tougher nut to crack. Like talks to end a particularly difficult strike, the negotiations dragged on for hours late one Sunday night and, at various intervals, Kenny was sent upstairs to an empty room while the union man mulled over his increasingly indulgent terms. Eventually, he succumbed and, within a matter of months, all four houses were demolished and planning permission was obtained for a five-storey office block on the site. The crude pre-cast concrete building, designed by Brendan Jeffers Associates, was let to merchant bankers Hill Samuel and sold to Friends Provident even before it was finished in 1971.

For the much larger Mount Street development, Dodder secured the necessary finance by mortgaging and re-mortgaging the Shell block in Hatch Street. Though it cost about £350,000 to build, the company managed to raise five separate loans totalling at least £1.5 million on the strength of its appreciating value, and this largesse helped to fund the treble-block complex in Lower Mount Street. Dodder also hired the same architects, Burke-Kennedy Doyle, and they came up with a clever scheme which relied on projecting bay windows to give a vertical emphasis and break up what would otherwise be a long and monotonous street facade. However, only Bridge House – the corner block with the striking stainless steel sculpture in front – can be judged a success. After all, in Ferry House and the block next door, the repetition of projecting bays is simply boring and one has no sense that they are, in fact, separate buildings.

But long before these blocks were completed, Dodder Properties had embarked on an even more ambitious scheme taking in the eastern corner of Lower Mount Street and all of Clanwilliam Place. And the sequence of events that led to this whole area being covered in office blocks provides yet another insight into how architects get work. In this case,

Austin Murray was the man of the moment. He had just given up his job as Stephenson and Gibney's office manager when he heard on the grapevine that three houses on Clanwilliam Place were about to be put up for sale. Never one to miss a trick, especially if it might land him a lucrative commission, Murray rang Charlie Kenny to tell him the hot news. For Kenny, it was a golden opportunity to gain a toe-hold in an area with major redevelopment possibilities and, in a quick deal, he bought the three houses for just £32,000. This was followed by the acquisition of premises occupied by Premier Dairies and Glaxo Laboratories, but it was clear that the key to unlocking the full potential of the area lay with Huet Motors. They had a large garage at the corner of Lower Mount Street, built on the site of Clanwilliam House, which had been destroyed during the 1916 rebellion in the bloody battle for Mount Street Bridge. Fifty years later, with the aid of Lisney's, the garage proprietors were busily engaged in buying up property in the area with the object of making a speculative gain by selling out to some developer. Their efforts paid off handsomely in mid 1971 when Dodder Properties agreed to take the whole parcel for over £200,000. Thus, a year after Austin Murray's telephone tip-off, the company had put together a site of more than two acres stretching from Mount Street Bridge to Grand Canal Street. And, of course, Murray got the plum job of designing the mammoth 'comprehensive redevelopment' scheme Dodder were planning to inflict on the area.

The Clanwilliam complex was to have half-a-dozen six-storey office blocks and a token block of flats set around a paved courtyard. There were to be banking and shopping facilities, a restaurant and bar, and lots of trees, shrubs and even a fountain on the Grand Canal frontage. But the Corporation rejected Murray's original design, which apparently relied on pre-cast concrete, and he was told to produce something, anything, in brick. It didn't seem to bother the Corporation that the revised scheme was a particularly vulgar example of the worst kind of commercial architecture. Or that the almost-continuous horizontal bands of brick and glass would leave Clanwilliam Place looking like a long, striped wall, six storeys high. It was only after the first two blocks had been

built that the Corporation began to have qualms about this feature of the scheme, which is presumably why the last block here was reduced in height and done in a completely different style. But this only makes it look like a scutty shed, an arbitrary addition to the much larger blocks right alongside. And, needless to say, the whole complex didn't include all of the goodies promised at the outset. There is no bar, no restaurant and no fountain. The 'shopping facilities' consist of a single newsagent's shop and the landscaping is of the most desultory kind. Even Charlie Kenny admits to being 'ashamed' about how it turned out. Clanwilliam, he says bluntly, is 'the greatest piece of shit we ever built'.

But that didn't stand in the way of Dodder Properties making a substantial profit on the development which, at over 180,000 square feet, is one of Dublin's largest office projects. Indeed, the company had become so spectacularly successful that, to avoid confusion, the venerable Paddy McGrath had to change the name of his family investment vehicle from Dodder to Avenue Investments. Clanwilliam was completed in stages between 1974 and 1978, all six blocks were let to a multiplicity of private and public sector tenants and were then sold off in quick succession to a variety of institutions. The Aer Lingus pension fund took two blocks, the UK Post Office and Construction Industry Federation pension funds took one each and the last two were acquired by the Norwich Union insurance group. Neither was there any shortage of takers for Dodder's three blocks on the west side of Mount Street. In mid-1975, for example, merchant bankers Lombard and Ulster paid almost £1 million for Bridge House, established their headquarters there and re-named it Lombard and Ulster House. But even after paying that price, the bank was still able to make a large profit by selling the block some years later to a Scottish pension fund.

There were strings attached to Dodder's deal with Lombard and Ulster, however. As part-payment for Bridge House, the company had to relieve the bank of a troublesome site on Harcourt Road. In common with many other financial institutions, Lombard and Ulster had been left with sites like this on its hands following the dramatic collapse of the market in 1974. It was largely their own fault, for the banks had fallen

head over heels in love with property speculation during the boom years which preceded the crash. Everything – site values, rental levels, profits – was climbing dizzily upwards, and the banks were swept off their feet by the lusty glamour of it all. They assiduously courted developers large and small, entertaining them to expensive lunches, urging them on to even greater excesses and offering them money - any amount of it – to finance their speculative endeavours.

One of the banks' golden boys at the time was young Jim Stafford, dashing scion of a wealthy Wexford family who made their money from coal and shipping. They owned almost half of the buildings on the Wexford quayfront and lived at Cromwell's Fort, a substantial mansion just outside the town. Even in his teens, young James Joseph had shown a knack for property speculation and he was barely twenty-five when he came to Dublin to carve out a career in the business. He took up residence in a suite at the Gresham Hotel, then owned by the Stafford family, hired Austin Murray as his architect and established a string of front companies, of which Stonebridge Ltd was the most active.

Stafford's only interest was making money, so the buildings Stonebridge developed were in the cheap and nasty category. The first scheme, completed in 1971, was a Murray-designed four-storey office block on Aston Quay. With its standard brick elevation and aluminium sash windows, it was carelessly plonked into the middle of a unified terrace, built in the 1920s, and set back at an angle to suit the Corporation's road-widening plans for the quays. But Stafford made a packet on this awful block by selling it to Norwich Union after the Corporation itself agreed to lease the bulk of the office space. Even worse was his next project, Iveagh Court near Kelly's Corner. This pile of pre-cast concrete, standing nine storeys high on stilts, qualifies easily for any shortlist of the worst modern buildings in Dublin. It was even shunned by the mainstream insurance companies and pension funds because of doubts about its structural stability. Eventually, however, it was sold to the PMPA.

In 1972, before Iveagh Court was finished, Stafford was laying plans for another nine-storey office block right next door. Everything seemed to be coming up roses. With access

to an almost unlimited supply of cash from the banks, notably AIB, he was buying up development sites all over the city centre. Schemes were drawn up for office blocks in Earlsfort Terrace, Clare Street, Ely Place and the site of the Moira Hotel in Trinity Street, which he bought from Jury's after it was closed down in 1973. But Stafford's most spectacular project was a massive nine-storey mirror glass office block in Tara Street, designed for him by big-league architects Michael Scott and Partners. This enormous block, containing over 100,000 square feet of office space, was to be built on the site of Richardson's builders providers and the adjoining Victorian baths, which Stafford had agreed to purchase from Dublin Corporation. But he failed to carry through this deal because, in 1974, his property empire collapsed like a house of cards. The sites he had bought at relatively high prices plummeted in value and his bankers were left to pick up the pieces. Stafford abruptly departed for Monte Carlo where he established residency and at least one writ had to be served on him by publishing an advertisement in the French newspapers. Just six years later, when the hue and cry had died down, the ageing young playboy staged a Lazarus-like resurrection as one of the founders and major shareholders in the highly speculative oil exploration vehicle, Atlantic Resources. His earlier career as a high-flying wheeler-dealer had been all but forgotten.

Only the banks remembered. Indeed, how could they forget all the trouble they had in disposing of Stafford's collection of redundant sites? His Earlsfort Terrace property was eventually sold to Silvermines Ltd for £250,000, and they demolished the four Victorian stucco houses on the site to make way for a discordant five-storey red-brick office block, which was let to the Department of Posts and Telegraphs. The good old PMPA bought Nos. 2-4 Ely Place and built a Georgian 'replica' office block to a design prepared for Stafford by Barry and Associates. A much less sympathetic development would have replaced two fine Georgian houses in Clare Street – one of which is the long-vacant premises of Addressograph-Multigraph – but nobody acted on his planning permission and, mercifully, it has since expired.

Meanwhile, the abandoned Moira Hotel was eventually

sold for about £120,000. The purchasers were Vico Estates, a Lurgan-based firm which became involved in a number of property ventures in the Dublin area. In fact, they carried out only two significant developments – a very harsh office and shopping complex in Finglas, designed by Patrick Rooney, and a thoroughly inept fake-Georgian scheme of offices and flats called Herbert House, in Pembroke Road. Otherwise, Vico were engaged in straightforward speculation. They certainly made a big killing on the Moira Hotel. Having done nothing more than demolishing the old building, Vico sold the site in January 1982 for over £900,000 – nearly eight times what the company had paid for it less than four years earlier. They had got out just before the market collapsed yet again, leaving hapless builders Flynn and O'Flaherty with a very expensive site which they could neither develop nor sell.

Vico Estates – whose directors included Charles Garville, of Warrenpoint, Co. Down, and Richard Sneddon, of Lanark, Scotland – also did very well out of their 'investment' in the Corn Exchange, on Burgh Quay. This historic building had been a target for speculation since 1963 when a consortium involving Derry-born singer Josef Locke bought it for only £23,000, as Locke himself boasted more than twenty years later. In 1970, they sold the property to Vico for a sum just short of £200,000. Vico wanted to build an eight-storey office block on the site but, because the building was listed for protection, the Corporation would only grant approval for a scheme that would retain the solid granite facade. However, instead of proceeding with this modest development, Garville and his associates simply sat on the property. Over thirty tenants were given their marching orders and then the spacious interior, with its rectangular lantern roof supported on cast-iron columns, was totally gutted. Early in 1979, Vico sold what was left of the Corn Exchange to the *Irish Press* for £860,000. The cash-starved newspaper group intended to develop offices on the site, which adjoins its hideous curtain-walled printing plant, but these plans were never carried through. Instead, the *Irish Press* spent £1 million on the acquisition of a tacky three-storey office block in Tara Street, built in 1967 by Heiton McFerran. After twenty-

two years of speculation, the Corn Exchange has been reduced to nothing more than a derelict site with a bricked-up classical facade.

Meanwhile, the Richardson's site in Tara Street was eventually sold to Rockbury Properties, a company set up by surveyor Liam McDonnell and chartered accountant John McDonald, who were both involved in a variety of small-scale developments. They unearthed a ten-year-old design for a humdrum seven-storey office block, drawn up for Jim Stafford by Austin Murray, and it was this block that was built on the site in 1982. The no-frills building, with its incredibly pokey entrance, was set back fifteen feet to take account of the Corporation's road-widening plans. All seven floors were let to the Corporation's own building by-law department and Rockbury made their money by selling the whole block to the Bank of Ireland pension fund. In the meantime, almost a decade after the abortive deal with Stafford, John Byrne and his Carlisle Trust agreed to purchase the adjoining Tara Street baths from the Corporation on condition that he would get permission for a seven-storey office block on the site. Naturally, the architect for this development was his old friend Desmond FitzGerald, and he ran up one of his predictably standard designs. Vertical in emphasis and clashing madly with Rockbury's horizontal bands next door, the FitzGerald block made no provision for shops or other non-office uses at street level. From the professor's rather unclear drawings, the planners couldn't tell the height of the building and it was only after he had submitted a revised set of plans that permission was granted in April 1983. It is highly unlikely, however, that this block will be built until John Byrne has some prospect of letting it, which may be a very long time indeed.

Thus, more than a decade after the shattering of Jim Stafford's dreams, the fall-out was still being felt. In that light, Lombard and Ulster must have been very relieved to get rid of his Harcourt Road site in their 1975 deal with Dodder Properties. The burden of nursing it through a recession was thereby unloaded on Enda Kelly and it was not until 1979, where there were clear signs of an upturn in the market, that work started on a seven-storey office block. Designed for

Dodder by Delaney McVeigh and Pike, this tasteless building features white pre-cast window panels set in the dullest of brown-brick cladding. With the cheap vulgarity of Iveagh Court on one side and the rather more sophisticated bulk of Montrose House on the other, the overall effect is so repugnant that one despairs of 'planning'. Taken together, it is no wonder that they have become known as the 'Gang of Three'.

The Harcourt Road block was not Delaney McVeigh and Pike's first commission from Dodder Properties. Back in 1973, they prepared plans for an office development at Warrington Place where vandals had been let loose on the pair of Georgian houses threatened by the scheme. And at the end of the same terrace, a subsidiary of Sisk's, the giant building contractors, wanted to get rid of five more houses to make way for another office block. 'Nibble, nibble, nibble: How the speculators are wrecking a major Dublin canalside road', said the headline on an exposé in *Plan* magazine. But then, Warrington Place was bound to come under attack because of its proximity to the Lower Mount Street redevelopment area. The four houses closest to the corner had already been replaced by a dreary office block called Sterling Winthrop House (another product of the ubiquitous M. W. Design Partnership) and it looked as if the rest of Warrington Place would go the same way. Indeed, the Corporation was quite resigned to this prospect because it had no hesitation in approving Dodder's destructive little scheme. One of the houses they left to go to rack and ruin had been the home of Fenian leader John O'Leary: romantic Ireland was surely dead and gone, and with O'Leary in the grave.

Meanwhile, Sisk's extracted permission for a four-storey block at the rear of their Warrington Place houses on condition that they would be restored for residential use. But Sisk's didn't bother to go ahead with this development. Instead, all five houses were blocked-up and that's the way they stayed even after the site had been sold to Hardwicke in 1977. Indeed, a further five years passed before they were finally refurbished to provide a total of twenty luxury flats. But this wouldn't have been done at all were it not for the fact that Hardwicke had permission to build a four-storey office block just feet away from the back windows. This

building, a half-hearted effort by Arthur Gibney and Partners, should never have been permitted because it represents a grotesque intrusion into the gracious streetscape around the Peppercannister Church. It has destroyed Mount Street Crescent and the area can never again be used as a period location as it was, not too long ago, for the filming of James Plunkett's *Strumpet City*.

For the developers, however, the rewards of building office blocks like this are manifest. In the case of Dodder Properties, a voluntary winding-up in 1980 realised a surplus of over £5.3 million for the shareholders – principally Enda Kelly, Charlie Kenny and their families. But even this large sum probably represents only a portion of their accumulated wealth, since the two Mayomen controlled over forty associated companies, though many of these were mere shells of convenience. Two years before the distribution, they had gone their separate ways, with Kelly holding on to the Dodder emblem, while Kenny relaunched himself under the flag of Clancourt Investments. And, like a homing pigeon, he was back in Lower Mount Street. His renewed interest in the area came as a blessed relief for jeweller Bernard Fitzpatrick. For several years, he had been buying up a lot of property on the east side of the street in the hope of repeating his earlier success with Hainault House, on St Stephen's Green. By 1978, bankrolled by Guinness and Mahon, Fitzpatrick had acquired a total of twenty houses, large and small, between Grattan Street and Love Lane and he had also got planning approval for a large office and residential development on the site. But because his acquisition costs had been quite high, his bankers were pressing him to sell and this he gladly did when Charlie Kenny presented himself as a likely purchaser. Kenny relieved Fitzpatrick of about half of his holding and the rest was taken by London and Leeds, the property wing of Ladbroke's 'leisure' empire. With the site came Austin Murray, who had done the design work for Fitzpatrick and got him the planning permission.

In this case, however, Murray became a mere handmaiden of the Corporation. The planners dictated not only the content but the form of development, exercising rigid aesthetic control. They wanted a scheme that would 'have regard to'

the 'relationship' between the site and the 'outstanding civic design quality of Merrion Square. It didn't matter a whit that the site was quite some distance down Lower Mount Street and, therefore, its 'relationship' with Merrion Square was tenuous, to say the least. The planners wanted Georgian pastiche and they were determined to get it. Even samples of the brick to be used as well as window frames and glass (not tinted, they said) had to be submitted for their approval. Thus, the building that emerged from this process must be regarded as a fair reflection of the planners' vision for Lower Mount Street in the mid-1970s.

It is a mess. Strung out along the east side of the street, the Clancourt/Ladbroke development is characterised by long rows of mock-Georgian sash windows (in aluminium, of course) sitting on top of pre-cast concrete arches at street level. There is an asymmetrical break in the monotonous facade, which might have made room for a little piazza, but it's only a ramp leading down to a lane at the back. And here, the arches are unaccountably split up into bits and pieces; somebody must have lost his measuring tape somewhere along the line. But in spite of the woeful appearance of the scheme, the ESB personnel department happily leased the Clancourt block, though staff got £400 each in 'disturbance' money for agreeing to move a few hundred yards from the board's headquarters in Fitzwilliam Street. The Ladbroke block was taken by a hive of tax inspectors, and the completed development was then sold off in two lots to the Guinness and UK Post Office pension funds.

Apart from over 100,000 square feet of offices, there are two blocks of flats – though these are secreted in the bowels of the scheme and, of course, they are in the 'luxury' class, mostly occupied by the kind of people who can be seen any night in trendy local taverns like Scruffy Murphy's. They have taken the place of the original inhabitants of Lower Mount Street, the young families, the middle-aged and old people who were forced into exile in Dublin's far-flung suburbs by the relentless march of the office developers. In the twenty-five years to 1981, the population of Westland Row parish fell from 30,000 to just over 6,000, and those who were left behind suffered a massive degradation in the

quality of their environment. Five days a week, every street, lane and back alleyway in the area is clogged with cars. The whole area has become a vast parking zone for the office workers. Only at weekends does it revert, temporarily, to the people.

On top of this great inconvenience, the older folk of the area have lived in almost constant terror that their homes would be swept away by the speculators. 'The vultures are preying on the community, ready to swoop and put up office blocks against the rights of the people', said one local curate, Father Thomas O'Keeffe, in 1974. 'Intimidation is happening. A woman in Mount Street comes to me trembling with fear every week saying, "I am being pushed out, bullied out of the area." We have a social service centre and free legal advice, but most of the older people feel isolated, intimidated and afraid . . . Power, influence and money are the deciding factors, not people.'

And even those who didn't lose their homes often had to live in the shadow of a 'prestige' office block. That's what happened to the residents of the flats and houses in and around Cumberland Street, right behind Westland Row church. For years, they had lived quite contentedly beside the Autocars garage in Fenian Street. In 1971, however, Autocars sold their extensive holding to British Land, though nobody outside the charmed inner circle of Dublin's property world knew that the purchaser was, in fact, one of Britain's largest developers. Indeed, the involvement of British Land in the deal was deliberately concealed until long after planning permission had been obtained for a gargantuan office development on the site. This was done in a most cynical and devious way. The planning application for a huge T-shaped office block, designed by Killiney architect J. M. Moran, was submitted to the Corporation in the name of a front company called Citadel Securities. But this company didn't even exist at the time. It wasn't registered in Dublin Castle until 1974, three years *after* the planning application was made, and even then, the file didn't disclose that its parent was British Land. All it said was that the company's 'effective centre of management' was at an address in Morden, Surrey, though its registered office was supposedly in Cork. Since then, in flagrant

breach of the Companies Act, Citadel has failed to submit any annual returns showing its directors and shareholders.

However, the fact that the company was not a legal entity at the time didn't stand in the way of its planning application for Fenian Street being processed through the normal channels. In March 1972, the Corporation lamely refused permission for the development on the grounds that its height, at eight storeys on a raised podium, was 'excessive and would constitute an injury to the amenity of the area'. Some injury! Citadel appealed to the then Minister, Bobby Molloy, and he granted approval just six months later subject to only one condition – that the height would be reduced to seven storeys. Some concession! This in no sense diminished the overbearing impact of the scheme on the nearby flats and houses. But then, Molloy didn't have to live with the consequences. Neither did Citadel's architect, J. M. Moran, or the yachting solicitor John Gore-Grimes and his brother Anthony, who look after the interests of British Land here through its *real* Irish subsidiary, Arch Properties.

After getting the green light from Bobby Molloy, British Land raised a £3.5 million loan from the Marine Midland Bank of New York to finance the development of what became known as Cumberland House. The construction programme was bedevilled by crises, not least the collapse of the main contractors, Hugh O'Neill, though the block was eventually completed in mid-1977. A year or so later, the bulk of its 118,000 square feet of office space was let to the Department of Posts and Telegraphs, whose valuable 35-year covenant is still a source of great comfort for British Land. There is ample space over and under the podium for the civil servants to park their cars and, in idle moments, they can amuse themselves by squinting through the tinted windows at the neat two-storey houses and decent old flats down below in Boyne Street and Bass Place. As *Plan* magazine noted even before Cumberland House was completed, it is 'a classic case of the wrong sort of building being permitted in the wrong sort of place'.

British Land didn't care much about it, so long as the tenants paid their rent on the nail. But at least one developer did show some belated concern for the local community.

Enda Kelly, chairman of Dodder Properties Holdings, remembered what Westland Row parish was like when he used to cycle through the area on his way to classes at UCD's engineering school in Merrion Street. And he appeared to be genuinely shocked by how the area and its population had been decimated. At least partly prodded by self-doubt, he arranged a meeting in August 1982 between representatives of the many organisations with offices in the area and the people who actually lived there. But if he expected the locals to swallow his thesis that the impact of office development had been exaggerated, he was dead wrong. Geraldine Murphy, secretary of the Westland Row Community Council, eloquently laid it on the line. 'I know from living in this area over the past fifteen years, from walking its streets and squares, what's been happening. The whole place has changed. I would see houses where people lived boarded up and left derelict until there were whole terraces of them. Then, the bulldozers would move in and they would be replaced by office blocks. Nobody knew why it was happening. We were never consulted or even told what was going on. All we saw was the awful dereliction all around us, caused by faceless people doing things for their own economic reasons.'

Nine

'The savages have triumphed. As a nation, we can hang our heads in shame because we cannot recognise the symbols of slavery from the reality . . . We cannot be trusted with a city, or with civic architecture, and our record in the recent past shows it.'

What was happening on the northside while the developers were engaged in their rip-roaring orgy of demolition south of the river? The answer, in a nutshell, is very little. Out of the total of over three hundred office blocks built in Dublin since 1960, only thirty-three are located north of the Liffey, though this was the area that most needed 'urban renewal'. Why? Because it just isn't fashionable. The northside has been out of favour for a very long time. Indeed, its fate was sealed over two hundred years ago when the Duke of Leinster, the trend-setter of his day, decided to build his town house overlooking Merrion Square. Steadily, and at an ever-increasing pace, the gentry followed in his footsteps, leaving the northside to fall into irreversible decline. Even today, most of the modern nobility – the decision-makers of the civil service and the business community – live on the southside, and that's one of the reasons why the office blocks where they work have been built on *their* side of the river.

Mountjoy Square became the symbol of the neglect and degradation of the northside, particularly over the past twenty-five years. Though it was the finest of the three Georgian squares (Merrion is too big and Fitzwilliam too

small), many of its once-proud houses were reduced to teeming tenements as the professional classes fled south. And because of the rent control laws, it became increasingly uneconomic for landlords to keep their properties in good repair. The fabric of the square deteriorated rapidly and, by the early 1960s, houses were being condemned by the Corporation and demolished as dangerous buildings. These demolitions and the precarious condition of many surviving houses paved the way for speculators and, within a matter of months, a company called Leinster Estates had bought up several properties for as little as £400 apiece.

Leinster Estates was the vehicle of the legendary Matt Gallagher who, like so many others of his ilk, had made a small fortune in the building trade in England after the war. He was from Tubbercurry, in Co. Sligo, and when he returned home he set up a factory making doors and windows in the local parish hall. Along with brothers James and Hubert Gallagher, he built roads in the Sligo area and then got involved in system-building before deciding to branch out on his own and carve a niche for himself in the Dublin property world. By 1970, his Gallagher Group had become one of the largest builders in the capital, with a programme totalling 4,000 houses. And Matt didn't achieve that staggering output without a streak of ruthlessness. On one occasion, another developer sought his advice about a little problem he was having in Monte Carlo. The poor man was planning to build a block of luxury flats, but he couldn't get rid of people living in an old house on the site. 'The thing to do', said Matt helpfully, 'is to get two bags full of starving rats and let them loose in the attic. Your problems will be gone inside a week.'

If that was how Gallagher operated himself, it is no wonder that he managed to buy up half of the south side of Mountjoy Square. His solicitor was Christopher Gore-Grimes and it was through him that he was introduced to Desmond FitzGerald. Thus, in much the same way as FitzGerald became John Byrne's architect, he was also taken on board by Matt Gallagher. And while the professor was preparing plans for an office development covering most of the south side of the square, Gallagher was busily ejecting tenants and demolishing some of the houses he had acquired so cheaply.

His activities did not go unchallenged, however. The Irish Georgian Society was gravely concerned about the fate of Mountjoy Square, and it moved to checkmate Gallagher by purchasing properties critical to his redevelopment plans. Mariga Guinness personally led the way by paying out good money for No. 50, a dilapidated house near the corner of Gardiner Street. And when Gallagher pulled down the houses on both sides, she dragged him before the High Court. At the end of a five-day hearing in February 1966, she won judgment and costs against Leinster Estates. The company was compelled to provide her house with lateral support in the form of six heavy wooden buttresses. It was a famous victory which she felt had 'put an uncouth peasant in his place', and the redoubtable Mariga celebrated by proceeding with the restoration of No. 50 to provide a suitable home for her collection of architectural drawings. She also amused herself by having a straw doll made in Gallagher's likeness into which she used to stick pins every day. Mariga and Desmond Guinness were fond of playing games.

In October 1967, the Corporation approved Gallagher's office block scheme. Councillors like Tom Stafford, then chairman of the planning committee, felt that he was the only man prepared 'to put money' into the square. They conveniently ignored the fact that a dozen houses were being restored at the time by Georgian preservationists though, of course, the money they had at their disposal was a mere pittance compared to the resources of the Gallagher Group. One of the houses undergoing restoration was opened to the public with the object of focussing attention on the need to save the square. It was part of a well-orchestrated campaign against the Gallagher scheme and it produced dramatic results. At the end of a public inquiry into the proposed development, Leinster Estates offered to sell its entire interest in the square 'without a farthing's profit' to the preservationists. This interest amounted to seven standing houses and thirteen cleared or half-demolished sites, and the price tag of £68,000 – vastly more than what Gallagher had paid for them.

However, the Georgian Society could not afford to ignore this offer. Gallagher was clearly testing their determination to preserve the square and they could not be found wanting.

Thus, members and supporters of the society got together to form a company called Mountjoy Square Estates with a view to treating with the enemy. The directors were a diverse bunch. Apart from Mariga Guinness, they included Professor Kevin B. Nowlan, architect Michael Scott, eccentric landlord Ivor Underwood and quantity surveyor Des McGreevy, one of the founder members of Taca. Matt Gallagher was also a strong supporter of Fianna Fáil and nobody was surprised when he eventually got ministerial permission for his office development in July 1969. But Kevin Boland laid down such strict conditions – requiring the reproduction of every house facade – that the viability of the scheme was questionable. This gave a new impetus to the lengthy negotiations between the two sides and, in December 1969, a deal was done. Gallagher's company agreed to sell out to Mountjoy Square Estates at the original price (£68,000) on one condition – that each house would be individually restored, maintaining the Georgian idiom both externally and internally. 'We have no intention of selling the site to Georgian speculators who might develop it as business premises', a spokesman for Leinster Estates explained.

Yet this is almost precisely what happened. The Georgians had bitten off more than they could chew. A lot of property they bought from Gallagher was in a ruinous state and they couldn't find purchasers willing to restore it. And because they didn't have any funds for security or maintenance, even the few good houses with superb plasterwork by Michael Stapleton fell prey to vandalism and decay. Chunks of brickwork began falling into the street and the Corporation had to demolish one row of houses to first-floor level for safety reasons. Thus, it was with some relief that Mountjoy Square Estates agreed to sell out to Patrick 'Paddy the Hook' McCrea in June 1972. A colourful Castlepollard farmer with a strong interest in horses, he had no trouble raising finance from a London fringe bank for his plan to build three office blocks with Georgian 'replica' fronts on the south side of the square. According to his architect, Austin Dunphy, it was to be 'the largest piece of restoration ever undertaken in Ireland'. Indeed.

Through front companies called after famous horses – Arkle, Vulgan and Nijinsky – McCrea quickly got planning

approval for the development and Sisk's started work on the first of the blocks, at the corner of Mountjoy Place. But McCrea's sources of finance soon dried up and, after an unsuccessful effort to buy Aintree racecourse, he was killed in a tragic car accident. His Arkle site, with its half-finished concrete shell, lay fallow until 1978 when it was sold to Stephen Treacy, owner of the Belvedere Hotel, for around £200,000. But after several fits and starts, Treacy also gave up. Indeed, in 1981, a section of brick-cladding on the still-unfinished block collapsed, demolishing two cars in the street below, and there was even a possibility that the structure might have to be condemned as a dangerous building. For the past four years, this roofless and windowless block has stood there, a gaunt testimonial to the deepest-ever property recession and to the overwhelming lack of interest in Mountjoy Square as an office location.

Even Desmond Guinness abandoned the square. Early in 1978, he sold No. 50, the house which had been the very symbol of the Georgian Society's epic struggle with Matt Gallagher. But that was over a decade earlier and, in the intervening years, the society had turned its attention elsewhere. Guinness himself spent long periods abroad, either in London or in the United States, where he became a sought-after speaker on the lucrative lecture circuit. At home, as president of the Georgian Society, he threw himself into the heroic rescue and restoration of threatened country houses – notably Castletown House, Ireland's most splendid Palladian mansion. His enthusiasm was infectious, if not always well-directed. Although he was an authority on Georgian interiors, his knowledge of the nuts and bolts of building conservation was quite limited. 'He was like someone who knew everything about *primulae* and nothing at all about horticulture', one former colleague recalled. As time went on, it became increasingly difficult to distinguish between his own personal interest and that of the society, since he was also involved in a private company dealing in Georgian period properties. More traumatically, his acrimonious separation and divorce from Mariga split the Georgian Society into fwo factions, all but extinguishing the flame which had so fired its crusade in the earlier years.

Guinness is believed to have sold No. 50 Mountjoy Square

for £60,000. The purchaser, John Lynham of Eagle Security Systems, had hopes of turning the house into a press club, but this fell through when it became clear that even journalists couldn't be enticed into the square. By then, Mountjoy Square was in an infinitely worse condition than when the conservationists first arrived on the scene. The south and west sides were massively disfigured by derelict sites and half-demolished houses and the square as a whole presented a shocking spectacle for tourists on their way to the city centre from the airport.

Meanwhile, No. 50 and the adjoining cleared sites passed into the hands of Ciaran 'Fange' Foley, a barrister and property speculator with a taste for fast cars. But because the house was listed for protection, Foley's plans for an office development on the site were turned down in April 1981. A month later, the interior of the house was gutted and part of the roof was removed. The Corporation refused to accept the explanation of Foley's architect and fiancée Clare Hogan, that these 'works' were 'remedial' in character and ordered that the roof be replaced. In October 1981, however, serious fractures were found in the walls and the house was condemned as a dangerous building – scarcely a dozen years after it had been restored. Finally, on a Saturday afternoon in May 1982, a demolition crew strung a hawser line through the front and back windows, attached it to a JCB and literally pulled the house down.

By then, Joe Moore and the PMPA were in the driving seat. They added Foley's site to the stockpile of half-demolished houses in the mid-section of the same terrace, which they had acquired earlier from an Isle of Man-based outfit called Balsalm Finance. Operating through front companies like Consolidated Reality, the motoring insurance conglomerate had plunged into property in a big way during the late 1970s. They had a very fine glass-fronted headquarters in Wolfe Tone Street, designed by Scott Tallon Walker, but their other property investments were often injudicious. In 1977, for example, they paid almost £½ million for a derelict site in Amiens Street, owned by Tom Stafford, the garage proprietor, car hire merchant, boating enthusiast and former Fianna Fáil Lord Mayor of Dublin. But although the site carries

full planning permission for a major office development, it is still lying idle. The company's investment in Mountjoy Square had been much more costly. A total of £4 million was spent on the construction of a very worthy Georgian reproduction office block, designed by Sean Clifford and Associates, but it proved very difficult to find tenants for the 52,000 square feet of space because of the depressed state of the market. Thus, almost twenty years after the battle with Matt Gallagher, the south side of the square is being redeveloped fitfully along the same lines as Gallagher himself might have followed. And when it's all finished, the whole terrace will consist of little more than fake-Georgian office blocks with only a single basement in one of the surviving houses in residential use. No wonder Gallagher's architect, Desmond FitzGerald, still feels bitter about the 'victory' of the preservationists.

Cavendish Row and the east side of Parnell Square also fell prey to property speculation. Groome's Hotel, opposite the Gate Theatre, was a well-known haunt for prominent Fianna Fáil politicians, but this wasn't enough to save it from the clutches of New Ireland Assurance. The hotel closed down in 1975 and it was replaced by an extensive four-storey office block with a Georgian pastiche facade, which was let entirely to Dublin County Council on completion in 1978. Four years earlier, the council itself acquired the nearby Anchor Hotel and used the building for offices until it was damaged by fire in 1978. Then it was left derelict for over three years until the council got around to building another fake-Georgian office block on the site.

Further up Parnell Square, three more Georgian houses, dating from the 1750s, were replaced by a similar scheme, designed by Desmond FitzGerald for his old patron, John Byrne. This block was built on the site where Bill Fuller, owner of the Old Shieling in Raheny, once had plans for a 'Jumbo Jet Hotel'. Conceived in 1969, at the height of the tourist boom, it was to have been twenty-two storeys high, overlooking the Garden of Remembrance. But the Corporation refused permission, the tourists were frightened away by the troubles in Northern Ireland and Fuller himself headed off for the bright lights of Las Vegas. He sold his two Georgian houses, Nos. 13 and 14 Parnell Square, to Murphy International, the huge plant hire and civil engineering contractors. Though listed for preservation, they were not secured and were thus left open to vandals and, in mid-1974, an unidentified corpse was found on the premises. After a further six years of dereliction and decay, the two houses were purchased by John Byrne, who had no problem persuading the Corporation to approve plans for a Georgian 'replica' office block on the site. While construction work was under way, Byrne bought up the house next door, No. 15, which had magnificent rococo ceilings and outstanding internal joinery work. It also had strong historical associations with Parnell, who often stayed there while it was the home of Joseph Kenny, Nationalist MP for Cork. But the house was so destabilised by the deep excavations for Byrne's adjoining office block that it had to be condemned as a dangerous building. The tenants were shifted out, the once-fine house demolished and Byrne later got permission to extend his office block over the cleared site. As designed by Desmond FitzGerald, it is a poor example of Georgian reproduction architecture, with an overbearing roof, suspended ceilings covering parts of the taller windows and see-through concrete steps in front of the main entrance. But the City of Dublin VEC didn't seem to mind. They rented the entire block as an outpost for the nearby College of Marketing and Design.

Much more despicable was the extraordinary behaviour of the Jesuit authorities of Belvedere College, just around the corner in Great Denmark Street. For several years, they had been pulling down Georgian houses to the right of their base in Belvedere House. Then, on 26 April 1968, they published a planning notice in the newspapers announcing their intention to demolish two particularly fine houses on the left-hand side of the college 'because of structural defects'. Both houses were listed for preservation; one of them had been the home of stuccadore Michael Stapleton and its interior was a stunning example of his craftsmanship, complete to the last detail in the refinements of the eighteenth century. But this didn't stay the hands of the Jesuits. On the very same day as the planning notice was published, they called in a wrecking crew. The finest ceilings in Dublin, yards of carved architraves and dozens of plaster over-doors were hacked to bits before

conservationists raised the alarm and the Corporation ordered a halt to this blatantly illegal demolition work. It was, as *Build* said at the time, 'an unedifying example to the future young gentlemen of Ireland'. But the Jesuits had achieved their purpose; if the two houses had few 'structural defects' beforehand, they certainly had plenty by the time the orgy of destruction had finished. And despite vigorous protests from the Dublin Civic Group, the college got permission to replace the houses with an appalling pastiche extension, designed by Jones and Kelly. In 1982, Belvedere celebrated its 150th anniversary by whipping away another 'dangerous' Georgian house at No. 9 Great Denmark Street. But it wasn't replaced by any new building, pastiche or otherwise. Instead, the cleared site was merely incorporated into the school playground, which now stretches all the way around the corner of Temple Street. And where there was once a complete terrace of Georgian houses, the college built nothing more than a red-brick boundary wall.

James Joyce, Belvedere's most famous pupil, might have smiled bitterly. He would also have been appalled by the demolition, in 1967, of No. 7 Eccles Street, the modest three-storey house he had immortalised as the home of Leopold and Molly Bloom. Undoubtedly the most important of all the lesser Dublin buildings mentioned in *Ulysses*, it should have been preserved as a literary landmark – though Joyce might have seen some irony in the fact that the authors of its demise were the holy nuns of St Dominic. They had plans to build an extension to their Eccles Street school on the site of No. 7 and two adjoining houses, which were demolished along with it, but *Build* correctly saw their scheme as 'a destructive omen that could ripple along this whole street'. Indeed it was. In 1978, the Dominican nuns – without bothering to consult the school's staff – sold their entire holding in the street to the Mater Hospital for over £1 million. The Mater, which is run by the Sisters of Mercy, lost no time in drawing up plans for a huge extension to the hospital covering the entire north side of the street. Altogether, thirty-six Georgian houses would be swept away and replaced by unsympathetic brick-clad modern blocks, designed by W. H. Byrne and Son. It didn't seem to matter that almost all

of these houses were officially listed for protection or that Eccles Street itself, one of the finest Georgian streets on the northside, would be utterly destroyed by the hospital's monstrous scheme – to say nothing of the loss to the city centre of yet another thriving school, the Dominican College. Of course, there were strong objections – from An Taisce, the Arts Council and the Dublin Civic Group – but the Mater Hospital couldn't be resisted. And when their planning permission came through, the Mercy nuns first proceeded with the construction of a money-making private nursing home where Bloom's house once stood.

O'Connell Street fared little better. This magnificent thoroughfare could have become Dublin's answer to the Champs Elysées, lined with fashionable shops and terrace cafés where people could sit and watch the world go by. Instead, the capital's main street was transformed into a honky-tonk freeway, cluttered with fast-food joints, slot-machine casinos, ugly modern office blocks, vacant buildings and even the odd derelict site.

The beginning of its decline can be dated very precisely. At 1.32 a.m. on 8 March 1966, Nelson Pillar was blown sky high. The soaring doric column, which had stood in the centre of the street since 1808, was reduced to an ugly stump by the shattering blast – apparently the work of a French explosives expert who had been hired by the IRA. But the Pillar was more than just the centrepiece of O'Connell Street; it was Dublin's principal landmark at the very heart of the city, the place where people met each other, where tourists came to see the sights and where every bus seemed to be going. Not everyone approved of the fact that it was a memorial to Britain's most illustrious admiral; many felt that his 13 ft high statue should be replaced by one of Brian Boru, Padraic Pearse or some other hero from the nationalist pantheon. The more republican-minded argued, with transparent dishonesty, that the whole column should be removed because it was a 'traffic hazard'. In the end, as so often happens in another context, the aims of the verbal republicans were translated into cold reality by the hard men on the ground.

The Fianna Fáil government was equally culpable for the tragic loss of Nelson Pillar. With the fiftieth anniversary of

the 1916 rebellion just weeks away, the politicians were carried off on a tide of republican fervour. Urgent appeals from the RIAI, among others, to save the stump of the Pillar with a view to rebuilding it later were blithely rejected. And so, on the night of 14 March – less than a week after the first explosion – the army corps of engineers detonated what was left of the monument. Philistines gathered on O'Connell Bridge to celebrate this act of destruction, drinking and carousing into the early hours, and somebody composed a pub ballad called 'Up Went Nelson', which became an instant hit. It was a disgraceful episode. 'The savages have triumphed', said *Build* in an indignant editorial. 'As a nation, we can hang our heads in shame because we cannot recognise the symbols of slavery from the reality . . . Is this all part of the farcical celebrations planned for Easter? Did our politicians feel that they must have visual evidence of our "independence", even if the reality escapes so many? Will the demise of Nelson prevent one emigrant leaving Dun Laoghaire or bring a crust of bread to an underfed child?' The lesson, *Build* said, was that 'we cannot be trusted with a city, or with civic architecture, and our record in the recent past shows it'. And when the debris of the Pillar had been swept away and the bills for damages paid, the Corporation laid out a ridiculous little pebble park on the site, surrounded by ugly barriers of the type used for cattle pens at a country mart.

This mean and boorish piece of 'civic landscaping' would not have been tolerated by Horace Tennyson O'Rourke. As City Architect in the 1920s, he was responsible for rebuilding O'Connell Street after the devastation it suffered during the 1916 rebellion and the civil war. But the dignified and noble facades he had ordained got scant attention from the developers who descended on the street during the late 1960s and early 1970s. The first move was made just six months after the demolition of Nelson Pillar when Aer Lingus offered to sell their premises at Nos. 40 and 41 Upper O'Connell Street for a suitable hotel scheme. Early in 1968, the two buildings were demolished to make way for the Royal Dublin, the first hotel to be built in the city centre since the reconstruction of the Gresham in the 1920s. Designed for Donegal-based hotelier John Costelloe by Ballybofey architect Patrick Carr, it features

champagne-coloured aluminium oriel windows set in a yellow-brick facade, a curious combination in a street where the predominant material is stone.

Costelloe was a very successful hotelier, who later made his home on an extensive stud farm near Maynooth. In addition to the Royal Dublin, his group owned the Trident Hotel in Kinsale, the Silver Springs in Cork and two hotels in Co. Donegal as well as Power's and the Wicklow in Dublin. Less than two years after he opened his O'Connell Street hotel in 1970, Costelloe acquired the Catholic Commercial Club next door. The founder of the club had been none other than Daniel O'Connell himself and the building it occupied for almost a century was the last surviving Georgian house on the street. It was built in 1752 to a design by Richard Cassels, the architect of the Rotunda, and its rather plain facade concealed a wealth of fine detail, including magnificent plaster ceilings and an exceptionally good carved wooden staircase. In 1975 and again in 1978, Costelloe was granted planning permission to refurbish the building to provide additional bars and function rooms for the Royal Dublin, but none of these works were carried out. Instead, this unique house was left derelict for more than ten years and, even though it was officially listed for protection, Costelloe secured permission in 1982 to demolish it. The Corporation, whose commitment to preservation has never been more than skin-deep, was quite prepared to have it replaced by a modern building with a sterile 'replica' facade – totally ignoring the fact that its main value lay in the splendid interior. The planners bought Costelloe's argument that the building had deteriorated to a 'very poor, if not dangerous condition' though, if that was so, it was largely due to his own neglect of the property over such a long period of time. Thus, a house of singular historical and architectural importance, which could have become a major tourist attraction in more sensitive hands, now stands in imminent danger of demolition.

Perhaps the most outstanding individual building in O'Connell Street, after the General Post Office, was Gilbey's. It had a high Victorian romanesque facade, with an elaborate porch and a crested roof in the style of a French chateau. But in 1970, before moving out to the Naas Road, Gilbey's showed

no sentiment by getting outline permission for an office development on the site. Then the property was sold off at a fat profit to Star (Great Britain) Holdings. Like so many other cross-channel developers, Star had been drawn to Dublin in the late 1960s. Their first project involved the replacement of four Georgian houses in the middle of a terrace on Pembroke Road with a large office block, three storeys in front and five at the rear. But despite the valiant efforts of the architect, Patrick Rooney, Oldbrook House (as the block is called) does not sit well with its more venerable neighbours. Star then moved on to Adelaide Road, where they built Astral House, a five-storey pre-cast milk crate on stilts, churned out by the Cheshire-based M. W. Design Partnership. The block was barely completed in 1970 when the Dublin Hebrew Congregation threatened to erect a screen wall of equal height to protect their 'ancient lights' on a long plot of ground separating Astral House from the nearby synagogue. Rights of light can be one of the trickiest problems in the property business. If two people own adjoining plots and one of them builds a structure with windows overlooking the undeveloped site, a right of light is acquired after twenty years – unless an obscuring wall is erected within that period. The real irony about the dispute over Astral House was that Star Holdings was run by English Jews, 'all flaring nostrils and not a foreskin in sight' as one estate agent rather crudely put it. The row was eventually resolved after two years of spirited haggling when the company agreed to purchase the adjoining site from the Dublin Hebrew Congregation, at a price above the market value, and another office block similar in style to Astral House was built there some years later.

In their O'Connell Street development, Star Holdings could quite easily have retained the facade of Gilbey's, but it was wantonly hacked down in March 1973 and only the stone heads of Gladstone and Palmerston, set in niches above the entrance, were salvaged. The new block, designed by London architects Arthur Swift and Partners, was supposed to be 'a sophisticated mix of shops, showrooms, offices and extensive car parking'. Some detected a dash of imagination in the design of the pre-cast units used to clad the building, but others were less impressed. According to one critic, 'the pro-

file of the units and the horizontal grills incorporated within them present the image of a skeleton gnashing its teeth'. But the real damage to the life of the street was done by Dublin County Council, who agreed to lease the entire block in 1975. They comandeered the ground-floor shops to create a preposterous council chamber, sound-proofed against the citizenry, where there is a 'public gallery' with seating for a total of eight people.

Between the county council's office and the Carlton Cinema there is a gaping hole in the streetscape. This large derelict site, fronted by the usual tatty hoarding, is located just opposite the Gresham Hotel, where the view must surely endear guests to the 'amenities' of Dublin. The Bank of Ireland is the none-too-proud owner of the property, which it acquired in 1979 for the reputed sum of £600,000. At the time, there were two sound buildings on the site – Gill's bookshop and a branch of Penney's, the department store. The Gill's premises was subsequently destroyed by fire and it collapsed on the weekend of the Pope's visit to Ireland in September 1979. Shortly afterwards, both buildings were demolished. But the Bank of Ireland has shown such little concern for O'Connell Street that it hasn't even bothered to lodge a planning application to redevelop its unsightly property. Perhaps it's a case of out of sight, out of mind. After all, its southside-based governors and senior managers would rarely have cause to pass through O'Connell Street, even on the way to the airport. And if they ever do get around to building something on the site, one may be sure that it will be in the modern style – just like the other developments which have so changed the character of the street in recent years.

The ghastliest, undoubtedly, is the five-storey office block which replaced Findlater's, the noted grocers and wine merchants who had been trading on O'Connell Street for well over a century. In October 1968, they sold their extensive premises to the Lyon Group's Irish subsidiary (chairman: Sean Lemass) for £353,000. Naturally, Lyon only wanted to get their hands on the half-acre site and, within months, they got planning permission for a five-storey office block with shops on the ground floor. The old Findlater's premises,

which occupied five buildings at the corner of Cathal Brugha Street, was eventually demolished in September 1972. Two years later, the vulgar new block was completed, let to the state and sold on to the London Transport Pension Fund. Designed by Lyon's in-house architects, it is entirely devoid of the dignity appropriate to its location and the clutter of brick-clad plant-rooms and other accoutrements above the mansard roof would have Horace O'Rourke rolling in his grave. Even more disastrous, as one critic wrote at the time, is 'the muddle of external columns, mullions and transoms' which, together with the horizontal tiling at first-floor and parapet levels, add up to a confused mess that might almost be regarded as a calculated insult to the street.

Socially, the most grevious loss to O'Connell Street was the demolition of the Metropole and the Capitol in mid-1973. They were more than mere cinemas. Behind its narrow terra-cotta facade in Princes Street, the Capitol had a restaurant, cafés, lounges and meeting rooms as well as an elaborately-decorated theatre with seating for 1,400 people. And the Metropole's bars, restaurants and ballroom were at the very hub of Dublin's social life for half a century. But the much-loved Metropole fell prey to the speculative greed of the Rank Organisation, which viewed it in the same context as the Theatre Royal – as a prime piece of real estate. Through its Irish subsidiary (one of the directors was former Tanaiste Sean MacEntee), Rank made a massive capital gain by selling the Metropole to British Home Stores in 1972. It is an indication of how much Rank netted on the deal that the costs incurred by BHS in their site acquisiton – including the Capitol and the adjoining Princes Bar – came to a staggering total of £1.2 million. And while it would obviously have been impractical for BHS to retain the latter two buildings in its department store scheme, the impressive facade of the Metropole could have been saved. It would certainly have been preferable to the new building produced by W. H. Byrne and Son, who had to be coerced by the planners to design the facade in natural stone with projecting vertical window bays. In their original scheme, the shop would have had nothing but a blank wall, in harsh pre-cast concrete panels, above ground-floor level.

According to Dublin Corporation's official policy, O'Connell Street is of 'major civic design importance', which is why it has been designated as a 'conservation area'. But this hasn't prevented the planners granting permission for a variety of insensitive, even tacky, developments in the recent past. Most ill-mannered of all is Burgerland, an aggressive granite-clad building with deep-recessed tinted windows, which was designed by John C. Scannell and rudely inserted into the predominantly brick terrace between Abbey Street and Bachelors Walk. And at the other end of the street, Parnell's fine monument is insulted by a pair of new buildings which are the Tweedledum and Tweedledee of mediocrity. One is the work of Sean Coen, a Galway building contractor, who managed to squeeze a shop and four floors of offices out his squalid little building, not to mention a penthouse flat, which comes complete with aluminium roller shutters. The building next door, developed by Liam Lonergan of Club Travel, is a very poor imitation of a fine new office block in Dawson Street and its most notable feature is the use of projecting box windows in screaming day-glo green.

Irish Life had much grander designs for the neglected northside. Since the mid-1960s, the state-owned assurance company had played the role of silent partner to developers like Hardwicke and Hume Holdings but, apart from one small office block on Wellington Quay, it hadn't built anything on its own. That all changed in 1968 when Cork-born Michael Lucey took over as property investment manager. A civil engineer by profession, Lucey came to Irish Life from Dublin Corporation, where he had been chief valuer for many years. (It was he who negotiated the purchase, in 1964, of 200 acres of land for that notorious architectural horror show – the tower and slab blocks of flats in Ballymun.) At the time of his arrival in Irish Life, the company's property portfolio was worth about £5 million. Less than fifteen years later, its value had soared to £500 million – largely as a result of Lucey's determined professionalism. He was a tough cookie who took no 'nonsense' from conservationists. To him, they were simply an obstacle standing between his company and its profits. 'Let us be quite clear about this', he said once. 'No developer is in business for the love of his country. He is

doing it for the money.' Armed with Irish Life's chequebook, Lucey bought up properties large and small, relentlessly assembling sites for office developments all over the city. Once, when asked if there was no limit to the company's endless expansion, he replied, with a glint in his eye, 'Maybe we'll stop when we reach Chapelizod.'

At the last count, Irish Life owned over 1.5 million square feet of modern office space in Dublin, making it by far the largest single freeholder in the city. And the first step on the road to this goldmine was taken in October 1971, when the company acquired the Brooks Thomas warehouse and timber yards on Lower Abbey Street. It was a remarkably bold move in the charting of unknown territory, which took the property market completely by surprise. But Irish Life steamed ahead and, in less than six months, Lucey had put together a site of three acres stretching back to Talbot Street at a cost of £900,000.

Plans were laid for a huge 'comprehensive redevelopment' scheme, for once in an area where it was needed, and the job of designing this complex was given to Andrew Devane. He had worked closely with Irish Life and Hume Holdings on Stephen Court and, indeed, he fell back on this project for his inspiration. Certainly, there is nothing terribly original about his design for the Irish Life Centre. The colour of the brickwork, the use of white aggregate arches at ground-floor level and the inevitable tinted glazing are all strikingly similar to the Stephen Court scheme. The real difference, of course, is the scale. Because the Abbey Street site was so much larger, Irish Life was able to extort almost three times as much office space out of it, though the company did throw in a shopping mall and fifty apartments as a sop to the ideal of a living city. At the time, Devane himself made a great show about the provision of these flats. If residential accommodation wasn't built with office blocks, the city would not survive, he declared. 'I would like to see the day when people will once again live over shops and business premises', said the architect, nobly. But Irish Life had to provide some residential units because its mammoth office complex would sweep away Northumberland Square, a tiny enclave of fourteen artisan houses just off Lower Abbey Street. By contrast,

however, the new flats are very much in the luxury league and they are so self-contained that the occupants need never walk out into the street; a lift transports them directly to the underground car park. Indeed, Irish Life's security-obsessed hostility to its environment is underlined by the fact that the main piazza, with its fountain and strange sculpture by Oisin Kelly, is cut off from the street at night-time by a dry moat and retractable drawbridges. By then, of course, the shopping mall has closed down and the whole complex is dead until the office workers arrive the next morning. But that's the way Irish Life wants it. After all, the bulk of the complex is the company's own headquarters, though about half of the 260,000 square feet is let to state and local government tenants – including the Corporation's planning department.

Irish Life is the Gulliver of the Dublin property world and its plunge into the northside soon had the Lilliputians rushing across the river. First to stake his claim for a share of the loot was Gerry Hickey, the Fianna Fáil solicitor who had seen the Queen's Theatre through its death-throes. In a sharp move, Hickey bought up the main Brooks Thomas shop in Sackville Place as well as the same firm's much larger ironmongery outlet just across the road, in Marlborough Street. He was bankrolled in the deal by Allied Irish Investment Bank, one of whose directors, accountant Jim Flavin, joined the board of the Hickey front companies involved – Sackville Estates and Clonmel Estates – though, curiously, nine of the ten £1 shares in both outfits were held by Guinness and Mahon's offshore trust in the Cayman Islands. Flavin acquired quite a taste for the rough-and-tumble of the property market. Through Lamda Holdings, he was involved in the development of Goldsmith House, an Austin Murray pre-cast block on the corner of Pearse Street and Tara Street, and he later left AIB to set up the Development Capital Corporation, which would sink a lot of its funds into a variety of property ventures.

Meanwhile, Gerry Hickey managed to combine his growing interest in property speculation with his regular job as senior partner in the law firm of Hickey Beauchamp Kirwan and O'Reilly. For the Sackville Place scheme, his architects were Tyndall Hogan Hurley and what they produced was one of

the ugliest modern buildings in Dublin. With two office floors clad in heavy pre-cast modules over a recessed mezzanine and ground-floor shops, it looks like a concrete Portakabin on stilts. But again, despite its horrendous appearance, Hickey got the OPW to lease the office space for the Department of Social Welfare while one of the shop units became Dublin Corporation's youth information centre. Having let the building, Hickey sold out to his erstwhile bedfellows in New Ireland Assurance and turned his attention to his site on the other side of Marlborough Street, where he was hoping to repeat the process. But this scheme never got off the ground. Instead, the old Brooks Thomas premises served briefly as a disco and, after it was destroyed by fire, the cleared site was used as a surface car park until 1978 when Hickey managed to persuade Irish Life to buy the lot for the exceptionally high price of £900,000. Along with adjoining properties in Marlborough Street and another slice of Lower Abbey Street, it has since been redeveloped as a major extension to the Irish Life Centre.

Others drawn across the river in Irish Life's slipstream included Moy Properties, a company with strong Guinness and Mahon links (one of the directors was Maurice O'Kelly, Des Traynor's right-hand man at G+M). They built a five-storey office block in Amiens Street, designed in his standard Clanwilliam style by Austin Murray, and they had the cheek to call this run-of-the-mill building Gandon House, presumably because of its proximity to the great architect's masterpiece – the Custom House. But when it came to one of Gandon's own legacies, the curving terrace of five houses on Beresford Place, Lisney's had no compunction about acting as agents for anonymous speculators who wanted to get rid of it. And Michael Scott and Partners were not in the least conscience-stricken about this nefarious scheme because they prepared plans for a bronze glass office block on the site. It fell to Edward McParland, Gandon's biographer, to point out the wickedness of their ways. The Beresford Place terrace, he said, was a rare and probably unique example in Dublin of a row of houses with a unified palatial facade. It was designed by Gandon himself as part of a quadrant setting for the rear elevation of the Custom House and, to destroy it, would be

the same as destroying part of the Custom House itself. Under fire, Lisney's withdrew their speculative scheme and the terrace is now officially listed for protection.

Gandon's other great work, the Four Courts, was also harshly treated. In the late 1960s, the OPW built a hideous two-storey extension on the roof of the old Public Record Office, facing Church Street. But the sheer insensitivity of this scheme was soon surpassed by the erection of River House. Located in Chancery Street, just behind the Four Courts, this incoherent building consists of a wedge of curtain-walling at ground and first-floor levels, topped by four storeys of pre-cast cladding and the inevitable ugly box on the roof. An affront to Gandon's architecture and to the vista northwards from Christchurch Cathedral, it was 'designed' by Limerick-based architects John Thompson and Partners. Dublin Corporation did not demur when it came to granting permission in 1972 and the conservation groups, obsessed as always with developments on the southside, didn't even notice because none of them bothered to appeal to the minister.

This was good news for solicitor Frank Fitzpatrick, who had a major stake in the development company, I. and E. Investments. His Fitzwilliam Square legal practice acted for many of the leading figures in the property world and, in time, Fitzpatrick himself became actively involved in speculation through a string of front companies like Cigale Holdings, which paved the way for Sterling Winthrop House in Warrington Place. His lucrative legal practice, combined with his 'nose' for property, made Fitzpatrick a millionaire and he later decamped for sunnier climes, leaving unpaid a £500,000 loan from one of the PMPA's subsidiaries. He set up home in the Spanish resort of Fuengirola, where he became involved in property development with José de la Torré e Morin, the honorary Irish consul for the Costa del Sol. In 1985, when the Revenue Commissioners published their first list of tax evaders, Fitzpatrick was among those fined £400 for failing to lodge income tax accounts. Also far away from these shores is Kelvin Smythe, one of his partners in the Chancery Street scheme. Once active in building houses, he sold land near Swords in 1974 for over £1 million and later moved to

New Orleans. The other two shareholders in I. and E. Investments were company director Edward G. O'Leary, of Foxrock, and Padraic Pearse English, a chartered accountant and senior partner in English Martin and Co. of Fitzwilliam Square. They all did very well out of River House. Completed in 1974, it was let to Dublin Corporation, the Eastern Health Board and the Law Reform Commission and then sold to the UK Post Office Pension Fund. Now part of the Irish property portfolio of American real estate investor David Friedman, the block has become a place of penitential pilgrimage for Dublin's car owners: it houses the notorious Motor Registration Bureau.

But let's not forget the flamboyant Eugene McSweeney, who had an incredible plan to build a 56-storey skyscraper in Parnell Street – of all places. A son of the sod from Leitrim, Ireland's most backward county, McSweeney emigrated to London in 1953 and made his fortune in pubs, dancehalls and property speculation. In 1973, he agreed to buy the four-acre Williams and Woods site for £2 million and hired Sam Stephenson to draw up plans for a tower block containing half-a-million square feet of offices, hotel accommodation and shopping facilities. McSweeney, who owned a one-million-acre farm in Australia, was a great believer in wide open spaces, and the only way this effect could be achieved in an urban context was by building tall. The amazing skyscraper he was planning for Parnell Street would have been over three times the height of Liberty Hall, but the proposal was taken seriously because he was rolling in money. At a time when even the likes of Michael Smurfit could be seen commuting to London on regular scheduled flights, the fast-talking McSweeney used to fly into Dublin on his own private plane.

His skyscraper scheme didn't get very far, however. After the 1974 property collapse, it shrank in stages from fifty-six to just fourteen storeys before vanishing altogether, like the proverbial Cheshire cat. There wasn't even a smile left. Indeed, it transpired that McSweeney had only paid Williams and Woods a deposit of £200,000 for their Parnell Street property. It was eventually sold to Hardwicke in 1978 for less than £1 million and they demolished the firm's old

premises – a very solid granite edifice, which had graced the top of Jervis Street since 1787. Later still, the derelict site was sold to Irish Life but, despite more recent plans for a major office development and 'conference centre', it is likely to remain in use as a surface car park for many years to come.

It was also Irish Life that picked up the pieces of Dublin Corporation's fantastical scheme to redevelop the entire area bounded by O'Connell Street and Capel Street, Parnell Street and the Quays. This utterly absurd idea was conceived by the English master planner Nathaniel Lichfield and endorsed by the City Council in 1964 at a time when everything seemed possible. The Planning Act had paved the way for local authorities to become vigorous 'development corporations' and, if they were going to plan for the future, what was wrong with doing it on a grand scale? After all, the Brazilians were building a vast new capital in the middle of nowhere and, if they could do that, Dublin Corporation could surely redevelop fifty acres of land in the heart of the city. The whole area was to be taken over by compulsory purchase, most of the existing buildings were to be demolished and there was to be a 'comprehensive redevelopment' according to a new layout. Needless to say, shopkeepers and others with property in the designated areas were horrified. They called for a more 'evolutionary' approach and, when their protests fell on deaf ears, they banded together to challenge the constitutionality of the Planning Act in the courts. They lost. As far as Dublin Corporation was concerned, they were only holding up 'progress'. The steamroller of officialdom was thrusting ahead and nobody would be allowed to get in the way. The planners, as usual, knew best.

Then, in 1966, the enormity of Lichfield's madcap scheme began to dawn on them. Instead of being redeveloped as a single unit, they decided, the area would be divided up into four or five separate parcels, with Moore Street/Chapel Lane as the 'first phase', a sort of pilot project for the rest. 'The Lichfield plan is in a heap', *Build* commented. 'Empty pockets have brought back a sense of realism.' However, long before it became apparent that the plan was being scaled down, there had been a headlong rush by speculators, auctioneers

and other professional wide boys to acquire property in the area ahead of the Corporation, according to the magazine. 'The Corporation has turned a blind eye to the methods being used, which range from straight buy to blackmail and midnight demolition.' By far the largest parcel of the eight-acre Moore Street/Chapel Lane site was snapped up by the euphemistically-named Irish Property Corporation, a joint venture by Roches Stores, British brewing giant Watney Mann and Star (GB) Holdings. 'They, with their professional advisers, had advance notice of what the then secret Lichfield proposals would contain', said *Build*. 'This was not obtained from Lichfield, but through channels in the Corporation itself.'

The speculators, as well as all the other property owners in the area, were eventually bought out by the Corporation under the Moore Street/Chapel Lane Compulsory Purchase Order. At a public inquiry into the CPO in October 1968, the Corporation insisted that all of the existing buildings would have to be demolished if the redevelopment scheme was to proceed. A total of over one hundred properties were affected, ranging from the tightly-packed hovels and junk shops of Riddle's Row and Cole's Lane – Dublin's very own casbah – to the decent terrace of shop buildings on the west side of Moore Street, which had survived the devastation of the 1916 rebellion. There was no question of saving this terrace, though it was an essential part of the streetscape. And, of course, the traders who gave Moore Street its character weren't consulted at all.

In 1973, when the relentless acquisition programme had been completed, the Corporation unveiled its staggeringly comprehensive redevelopment plans for the area. There were to be 400,000 square feet of retail shopping, 300,000 square feet of offices in two 14-storey blocks, a multi-level car park with space for one thousand cars, a 240-bedroom hotel and 50,000 square feet of 'leisure entertainment', including a theatre, two cinemas, restaurants and bars. Obviously, the Corporation couldn't possibly have undertaken this mammoth scheme on its own so, to find a suitable partner, it held a competition for developers. In the end, what *Plan* magazine described as a 'star chamber of officials'

awarded the contract to Irish Life, whose property investment manager, Michael Lucey, had played a leading role in the preparation of the Lichfield plan during his time as the Corporation's chief valuer. And under this cosy deal, as a report by the UCD School of Architecture pointed out, the properties of at least 102 former owners were handed over to one owner, namely Irish Life, in return for a payment of £3 million to the Corporation, a yearly rental of £70,000 and a nebulous share in the profits from the development. 'Not alone are low-cost residential elements totally excluded, but future shop-holders will have to compete for space at the going market rent', *Plan* commented. 'The travel firms, the banks, the faceless chain stores will move in. The café owner, the publican and the woman who operated the corner sweet shop will pass out; indeed, they are already gone. The properties on the west side of Moore Street are a sepulchre that hides Cole's Lane and the middle reaches of Parnell Street, now ruthlessly levelled by the mandarins of City Hall.'

And for what? The question must be asked for, within a matter of months of winning its prize from the Corporation, Irish Life was already scaling down the entire development. First to go was the hotel, then the 'leisure entertainment' complex and, finally, the office blocks. Even the size of the shopping centre, the very core of the scheme, was drastically cut down to less than 200,000 square feet. Indeed, by the time Irish Life was finished with all of this chopping and changing, the Corporation's ambitious plans for the Moore Street area were in tatters. And then, the state-owned assurance company added injury to insult by leaving the site derelict for four full years before construction work finally got under way in late 1978. Completed three years later, to a design by Irish Life's favourite architects, Keane Murphy Duff, the so-called ILAC Centre represents a scandalous waste of a prime city centre site. Apart from the multi-level car park, it is primarily a single-storey development, with shops on the ground floor and storage space above. Even a promised library, the only non-commercial facility in the centre, didn't materialise until 1985 because the Corporation claimed that it hadn't got the funds to fit it out. Externally, the street frontages are appalling. The Moore Street facade is

little more than a pre-cast concrete wall, 150 yards long, relieved only by ridiculous coloured plastic pyramids, steel bars and balls, like a strung-out chemical formula. And the Parnell Street 'frontage' has been politely described as a visual mess.

In 1981, just after the ILAC centre opened, Michael Lucey shocked conservationists by calling for the abolition of planning controls so that the development of the city could be left to 'free market forces'. Yet it is abundantly clear from the Moore Street scheme, in which he was so deeply involved, that the shape of Dublin is almost entirely determined by these forces. If the ILAC Centre doesn't have a hotel, a 'leisure entertainment' complex and two blocks of offices, it is precisely because Irish Life didn't think it economically worthwhile to build them. Like so much else that has happened in the city, it had nothing to do with 'planning'.

Ten

'Apologetic self-effacement should be left to public lavatories, V.D. clincs and the other necessary minutiae of society.'

One day in September 1965, Sam Stephenson received a very important phone call from John Broadhead, the managing partner of Lisney's. He said he had some clients who wanted advice about the development potential of a site they were assembling in Dame Street. They had already acquired the historic Commercial Buildings and were in the process of buying up several adjoining properties. It was all very hush-hush, far too sensitive to talk about on the phone, so Broadhead asked the famous architect to come along to a meeting at which all would be revealed.

The venue gave Stephenson his first clue to the identity of Lisney's mysterious clients. For the meeting was to take place, not in some secret hideaway but at the Office of Public Works in St Stephen's Green. Obviously, the clients were from the state sector. But who could they be? Stephenson soon found out. At the appointed hour, he was sitting with Broadhead at a highly-polished table in the OPW conference room when a man he recognised instantly walked in, carrying a bundle of papers. It was Chris Carroll, secretary of the Central Bank. Stephenson nearly fell out of his chair.

Carroll revealed that the Central Bank had plans to build a big office block in Dame Street and they wanted Stephenson to design it. Apparently, he was chosen for the task because the business establishment in the city admired the way he had stood up to the conservationists in the bitter battle over the ESB headquarters in Fitzwilliam Street. Clearly, the Central Bank's plans for Dame Street were going to provoke

some controversy, and the directors wanted a proven fighter in their corner. But at this early stage, with property acquisition still under way, the situation was very delicate and everyone at the meeting was sworn to secrecy. The only outsiders to be told, again on the basis of strict confidentiality, were the senior planners of Dublin Corporation. They readily agreed to treat the Central Bank's office block as a major civic building.

Eight years later, the whole thing blew up in their faces when it was discovered that the eight-storey block then under construction was almost thirty feet higher than it should have been. The directors of the Central Bank, along with Stephenson and everyone else associated with the project, found themselves in the dock. Here was one of the great institutions of the state caught in the act of breaking the law, and in such a flagrant fashion. It was, of course, a major scandal. But the way in which the various participants behaved, and the degree of their complicity in the affair, was never fully revealed at the time. People were left with the impression of an arrogant architect trying to 'put one over' on behalf of his 'big guy' clients. What they missed were the extraordinary double standards of Dublin Corporation.

At the outset, there was virtually no argument about the height of the bank's office block. Echoing public sentiment, the main concern of the planners – insofar as they had any concern at all – was to preserve at least the facade of the Commercial Buildings. Dating from 1796, this fine classical grouping was the venue for meetings of the Ouzel Galley Society, later subsumed into the Dublin Chamber of Commerce, and it is best remembered for its paved courtyard, which provided a charming short-cut for pedestrians on their way to Merchants Arch and the Halfpenny Bridge. In September 1966, when it was learned that this unique environment was under threat from the Central Bank, conservationists reacted with the usual combination of horror and dismay. *Build* magazine's commentator, Michael Quinn, summed up their feelings. 'The Government has done many silly things in the last few years, but to be contemplating . . . the demolition of a notable classical building and an oasis for pedestrians in the snarl of traffic is little short of criminal. What do I mean by "little short"? Is *is* criminal.'

The Commercial Buildings had been given top priority in the Corporation's preservation lists, but this didn't deter the Central Bank. For the directors – T. K. Whitaker, John Leydon, Patrick Bourke, John A. Ryan, James McElligott, William O'Brien, Malachi Sweetman and John Reihill – were what *Build* described as a 'Goliath line-up' and they were determined to have their way. In November 1967, with the approval of Charlie Haughey, then Minister for Finance, the bank submitted plans for a fifteen-storey skyscraper on the site. And while this was turned down by the Corporation, the planners granted permission a year later for a Seagram-style thirteen-storey block on the basis that the facade of the Commercial Buildings would be retained. This block would have been 176 feet high – more than fifty-five feet higher than the building later approved for the site, and the only reason why it wasn't built was that An Taisce appealed to the Minister for Local Government, Kevin Boland.

Unlike Blaney before him or his successors, Bobby Molloy and Jimmy Tully, Boland was a born-and-bred Dubliner. Reared in Ballybough and Marino during the early years of the Free State, he had some feeling for the city, its fabric and its people. Like many of his fellow-citizens, he was naturally suspicious of modern architecture and, when they showed him a scale model of the Central Bank, he thought it was 'a lot of bull'. At the same time, he was under intense pressure to grant permission for the scheme. His colleagues in government expected him to give it 'special consideration' and Haughey, in particular, canvassed for a favourable verdict. The issue was even raised in cabinet, but Boland was determined not to be 'railroaded' into making what he felt would be the wrong decision.

Thus, in November 1969, Boland threw out the bank's scheme. Upholding An Taisce's appeal, he ruled that the thirteen-storey block would be 'excessively obtrusive' on the skyline as well as being out of scale and sympathy with the character of existing buildings in the area. Some months later, the bank, its architects and senior Corporation planners had a top-level meeting to consider what to do next. James Molloy, the likeable bureaucrat who was then in charge of the planning department, thought Boland might be satisfied if the

bank chopped two or three storeys off the top of its building. But Sam Stephenson came up with a much more radical solution. He had just returned from a trip to the United States, star-struck by the work of Irish-born architect Kevin Roche, and it was there that he got the idea of 'hanging' the building. As the others gaped at him in cataleptic shock, he explained that it would be possible to take the Central Bank down to eight storeys by sort of turning it around and upside down. It all seemed very fuzzy, fanciful, even incredible. But the bank knew that it wasn't going to get anywhere with the thirteen-storey block, so this novel idea by its own architect was at least worth trying.

Before the end of May 1970, Stephenson submitted plans for his 'upside-down' office block and, by mid-August, the Central Bank had its permission. It was a most unusual building, with a structural system unique in Ireland. Basically, it consisted of two reinforced concrete cores supporting double cantilever trusses, from which the floors below were 'hung'. Thus, instead of the floors bearing the load of the roof structure, it was the other way round. But in terms of the Central Bank saga, the key feature of the building approved by the Corporation was that the roof was *flat*. Neither Stephenson nor the consulting engineers, Ove Arup and Partners, had worked out the details of the structural system. They didn't have time because the plans had been drawn up in such a rush. But the Corporation said not to worry, the details could be worked out later.

Meanwhile, the Central Bank started work on clearing the site. This involved the demolition of an evocative collection of Georgian and Victorian buildings, including the sumptuous Italianate Royal Insurance office, at the corner of Dame Street and Fownes Street. A great show was made of the bank's commitment to 'restore' the Commercial Buildings, and the blocks of cut stone were individually numbered before being taken down. At the time, the intention was to rebuild the frontage *in situ*, with matching side and rear elevations and an arcade opening onto the plaza in front of the bank's new headquarters. But this scheme was abandoned after the bank had acquired the adjoining Georgian-style building occupied by the Chase and Bank of Ireland. This

allowed Stephenson to enlarge his plaza by 'turning around' the Commercial Buildings to face Fownes Street. By then, the cut stone so carefully numbered and stored away had been junked and a 'replica', clad in newly-quarried granite, was designed to replace the original facade.

This was a major departure from the scheme approved in August 1970, so the Central Bank had to submit another set of revised plans to the Corporation. The application was lodged on 1 March 1972 and, in an amazingly rash move, the planners decided to grant permission just sixteen days later. They could have taken the full statutory period of two months to subject the plans to detailed scrutiny. Had they done so, much of the later embarrassment might have been averted. There were already strong indications that things were getting out of hand. In the eighteen months which had passed since the earlier scheme was approved, Stephenson and Arup's had worked out some of the structural details and, as a result, the parapet height of the building was increased by eight feet to 120 feet. This change was indicated in the March 1972 application, but the planners regarded the additional height as 'marginal' and, in any case, the roof was still *flat*.

In reality, however, the revised plans which were the subject of this successful application were already redundant. On 14 December 1971 – a full three months before the permission was granted – the Corporation planning department received a set of drawings from Stephenson which incorporated yet further revisions necessitated by technical difficulties. In effect, Stephenson and Arup's were making it up as they went along. These drawings not only showed the parapet height to be in excess of 120 feet but indicated clearly that the roof was no longer to be flat, but *pitched*! Moreover, Stephenson met James Molloy, the manager of the planning department, at the end of December and discussed these radical changes with him.

The Corporation were, therefore, already in possession of evidence which should have caused them at least to query the plans submitted for approval on 1 March 1972. Not only did they not do that but, as noted above, they actually gave their approval in double-quick time.

The following September, the *Architects Journal* published a perspective of the building for which planning permission had been granted and roundly condemned it as 'an exercise in how to do the greatest urban damage'. The design, the editors said, was 'aggressively distinct, monstrously over-sized and brutalism gone mad'. Little did they realise that what was by now actually being contemplated was something far worse. For in that very same month, the Central Bank had signed a contract with Sisk's for a building that would be exactly twenty-nine feet higher than that for which planning permission had been granted in the previous March. The contract specifications were in line with the drawings given to the Corporation by Stephenson on the preceding 14 December. Apparently none of the bank's senior staff had known anything about these drawings, and none of them twigged to they fact that what they were now signing for was significantly different from the plans for which they had permission. None the less, it was staring them in the face: the building approved by the Corporation just six months earlier had a flat roof, yet the contract documents signed by the bank included three drawings which clearly showed the building with a copper-clad pitched roof. Thus, the bank's claim that it didn't realise that the drawings failed to correspond with the planning permission looks both weak *and* foolish.

Meanwhile, construction work got under way and, by April 1973, the twin service cores were in place. *Plan* magazine published a photograph of these big lumps of concrete, viewed from College Street. 'The last thing Dublin Corporation or the Department of Local Government think about when they permit blocky buildings in central Dublin is the effect upon the profile of the nation's gems of architecture', said the caption. 'Here we have rising behind Gandon's chaste Corinthian portico of the old Parliament building the gargantuan mass of the new Central Bank.'

By then, of course, the bank's planning permission had already been breached. The two concrete towers were nine feet higher than they should have been and the roof superstructure was going to add a further twenty feet to the overall height of the building because of the need to carry heavier loads than originally envisaged. But Stephenson let the cat

out of the bag on 22 February when he allowed drawings showing the new roof profile to be published in the *Irish Times*, with his consent. Incredibly, the Corporation's senior planners would claim later that they hadn't seen this special feature, even though they had more than a passing interest in the project. After all, the planning department was housed at the time in a building right next door to the Central Bank site.

The chief planning officer, Charles Aliaga Kelly, had been observing the works in progress on an almost daily basis because he was personally intrigued by the method of construction. Kelly (the Aliaga bit was a legacy of his Peruvian great-grandmother) was a Dublin-born architect and town planner who had spent most of his professional life in the Corporation's planning department. A man of patrician mien, he had served as deputy chief planning officer for seven years until he got the top job in 1973 following the retirement of Michael O'Brien. But because O'Brien had long been plagued by ill-health, Kelly had effectively stepped into his shoes several years earlier. His distant rather professorial manner was a major handicap to him as chief planning officer. He had a tendency to talk around a subject in a somewhat discursive, scholarly manner. He was a gentleman in a job that – unfortunately – required a roughneck. Though well intentioned, he was also a victim of the wider struggle throughout the public service between professional and administrative staff. As he himself said once, 'It was like the engineer who hired a clerk to do his typing. One clerk led to another and, gradually, they took over his office and even his job. All they needed him for was to give advice on technical matters.' Thus, Kelly found his role increasingly usurped by hard-nosed bureaucrats who knew nothing about planning except what they had absorbed by osmosis. Their main concern was to avoid claims for compensation, so they looked at most developments from a narrow viewpoint, circumscribed by zoning and plot ratio requirements. Architecture and civic design took a back seat – and the city suffered as a result.

It was Kelly who first spotted that there was something amiss with the Central Bank. At the end of August 1973, after work had started on the roof superstructure, he noticed that it didn't correspond with his recollection of the approved

plans. He asked someone to check the drawings and then went off on his holidays. The 'discrepancy' was confirmed on 3 September but, instead of issuing a 'cease and desist' notice immediately, the Corporation merely 'requested' the bank to halt work. According to Stephenson, 'a lot of people in the Corporation were playing games.' Everyone was running for cover, hoping that the problem would go away, and one high-ranking official actually said to him, 'surely the bank is not going to stop?'

The bank didn't stop. Instead, work continued at an increasingly frenzied pace, even on Sundays, while Stephenson lodged a new application seeking to legitimise the unauthorised changes in the height of the building. Thus, by the time the Corporation decided to refuse permission on 23 November, much of the roof superstructure was already in place. The planners' decision, which was endorsed by city councillors, said the additional height was a 'serious obtrusion' on the existing skyline of the city which would affect views and vistas over a wide area. In addition, they said, the change in the roof profile would be 'visually discordant and generally out of character with the city centre environment'. But if this was so, how much more 'discordant' would have been the thirteen-storey high block approved by the Corporation itself just a few years earlier?

The revelation that the Central Bank was almost thirty feet higher than it should have been caused a huge controversy. A statement from the bank's directors, claiming that they had only discovered the discrepancy 'within recent weeks', was greeted with widespread incredulity. 'It is impossible, particularly when one studies the ever-changing "perspectives" produced by the architects . . . to fail to come to the conclusion that deception was at all times intended', said *Plan* magazine. 'The most charitable interpretation to put on this extraordinary episode is that all the parties knew, throughout most of 1973, that they would be in serious breach of the law, but they told nobody about it until the structure had approached the *fait accompli* stage.'

But there was another, perhaps equally controversial view, which saw the Central Bank as an exciting piece of architecture. 'The bank building has a commanding profile, with a dramatic

structural system, clearly expressed and not hidden behind curtain-walling', Martin Reynolds wrote in *Hibernia*. 'It is a big building, a landmark and a rejuvenation for a pretty jaded area of the city.' Under modern planning laws, he suggested, 'it would not now be possible to have the portico of the GPO overhang the path, probably the sweeping windowless curved facade of the Bank of Ireland in College Green would be refused consent on the ground that it did not provide adequate natural light and ventilation, and the dome of the Four Courts might exceed the permitted height for that area. Yet, would we wish to be without any of these?'

However, for An Taisce and other conservation groups, the real issue was the dangerous precedent that would be created if the Central Bank was allowed to get away with this, the most flagrant ever breach of the Planning Act. Calling for a public inquiry on the bank's appeal against the Corporation's decision, the Dublin Civic Group declared that this was *the* test case on which the whole future of planning in Ireland would stand or fall. They were supported by the Arts Council, the Living City Group, the architectural students of Bolton Street College, the Nutley branch of Fine Gael, Fergus O'Brien TD, a number of business firms with premises in the Dame Street area and at least half-a-dozen individual objectors.

The public inquiry opened on 19 February 1974 before a capacity attendance in the main conference room of the Custom House. Large teams of barristers occupied the front seats, behind mountains of documentation, while the walls were covered with maps, charts and photographs. It is a measure of the formidable legal artillery drawn up for the occasion that all four senior counsel involved went on to become High Court judges. They were: Donal Barrington, who represented An Taisce, Niall McCarthy (for the architects), James McMahon (the Corporation) and Eamonn Walsh (the bank). And one of the myriad juniors, bright young Peter Sutherland, who was with McCarthy, rose to the rank of Attorney-General before moving on to Brussels as Ireland's EEC Commissioner.

For three days, the great issues were thrashed out. Each side produced a rival set of photographs – wide-angle or tele-

photo, depending on whether they wanted to minimise or magnify the building – and the presiding inspector, Richard Stringer, said he would take them all 'with a grain of salt'. The biggest credibility problem for the bank was that its nakedly incomplete building looked so horrific. But its representatives gamely argued that the finished product 'will not look ugly, massive or top-heavy'. As for bringing it into conformity with the planning permission, well, that would cost a great deal of money – probably as much as £1.5 million, which was more than the original estimate for the whole building.

But Sam Stephenson was in no mood to have his work butchered at this stage. Any modification to the structural system would destroy his 'architectural concept' and, with it, the opportunity of 'enhancing the urban scene in a unique way'. He firmly believed that planners had no right to 'meddle' in aesthetics and that only architects – himself in particular – could decide what was right or wrong. As far as he was concerned, and he said so at the inquiry, a planning permission was merely a licence to develop an architectural concept. And if the height of the Central Bank had been increased by 25 per cent, this was the unavoidable outcome of a creative design process.

Stephenson's thesis was hotly disputed by the students of Bolton Street, which had awarded him an honorary diploma just eighteen months earlier. If the Central Bank's appeal succeeded, they warned, any developer could obtain planning permission for a building, add substantially to its height during the course of construction and then, after this was discovered, call in 'experts' to testify that it was a 'work of art'. The bank tried to counter this argument by suggesting that its building was of major civic importance. However, An Taisce insisted that it was just another office block – admittedly expensive and for a highly-prestigious client, but no different to the headquarters of any semi-state organisation. And Duncan Stewart, veteran of Hume Street and then a lecturer in Bolton Street, declared that the bank's building would 'stand forever as a monument in Dublin to show what you could do to overpower authority if you had money'.

In the end, that is more or less how it turned out. The

bank did lose its appeal and it had to go through another planning application and another appeal before permission was finally granted for a 'compromise' solution on 30 January 1975. The height was reduced marginally by omitting the proposed copper roof and taking down its steel supports. Instead, the heavy trusses from which the building is 'hung' were clad in copper and left exposed, making for the oddest roof profile in Dublin. Completed in 1978, several years behind schedule, the Central Bank ended up costing £10 million – more than five times the original estimate. The bank sued Stephenson for damages because of his 'unauthorised' departure from the approved plans, but the action was eventually settled when the architect agreed to pay a £200,000 'fine' without admitting liability. By then, of course, his fees had soared with the cost of the building and at least half of the fine was paid out of his professional indemnity insurance.

But the long-running row made Stephenson bitter. He railed against 'noisy lynch-mobs baying around the drawing board' and said that, above all, the architect needed 'courage and an understanding of historical perspectives to armour him against character assassination and see him through the Kafkaesque labrynths of conservation-claque controversy'. More and more, he began to see himself as a latter-day James Gandon, creating great pieces of architecture that would only be appreciated in the fullness of time. And Gandon, he was fond of pointing out, had once gone around town in fear of his life because of the violent public reaction to his plans for the Custom House – though he neglected to mention that the fires had been stoked by vested interests anxious to prevent the centre of trade being moved so far downstream. For Stephenson, it was a source of great solace that almost every public building of value in Dublin had attracted its own share of controversy. This was inevitable, given that important buildings would, almost by definition, stand out among their neighbours. 'Apologetic self-effacement', he said in 1974, 'should be left to public lavatories, V.D. clinics and the other necessary minutiae of society.'

There was certainly nothing apologetic or self-effacing about his scheme for the Educational Building Society's

headquarters in Westmoreland Street. In 1970, he obtained approval for a fairly straightforward 'reconstruction' of the Educational Chambers, at the corner of Fleet Street, and then brazenly proceeded with a quite different design. The old terracotta facade was torn down and, in its place, Stephenson threw up a shimmering shell of dark mirror glass. People were shocked by this ultra-modern intrusion into Westmoreland Street, none more so than the city councillors, one of whom dubbed it as a 'diabolical black box'. And it was largely as a result of this near-apoplectic reaction that the second stage of the EBS scheme was screwed up. The society had acquired three adjoining buildings – the Paradiso restaurant, with its splendid art nouveau facade, the main office of the *Irish Times* and Graham's pharmacy, one of Dublin's last surviving old-world chemist's shops. Stephenson proposed to replicate his mirror glass treatment on the site of the latter two buildings, while retaining the Paradiso facade as a sort of exclamation mark in the middle. But the planners, egged on by the city councillors, made a dog's dinner of the scheme by insisting that 'solid elements' of polished granite must be incorporated into the glass curtain wall. As a result, the EBS headquarters became a lop-sided mess, even if it does have the most exciting entrance lobby in the city – a five-storey atrium in the hollowed-out core of the old Paradiso.

In the case of the Central Bank, the whole controversy might have been avoided altogether if the bank had been more devious from the outset. Under Section 84 of the Planning Act, state authorities are exempted from the need to seek planning permission before embarking on the construction of a building, no matter how large. All they are required to do is to 'consult' with the relevant local authority and, if there are any objections, the Minister for the Environment (formerly Local Government) has the final say. But because there is no need to lodge a planning application and, therefore, no right of appeal by third parties, the public is entirely excluded from this process. The whole business is conducted behind closed doors and, as such, it is a major subversion of the right of public participation enshrined in the Planning Act. Effectively, the state is elevated above the

law, and the exemption it enjoys is not limited to developments with 'security' implications. It is a *carte blanche*, which applies to all government departments as well as the Office of Public Works, and it has been used – and abused – extensively over the years. As a 'state authority', the Central Bank might also have availed of this most convenient device by processing its Dame Street project through the OPW. If that had been done, not even the most vocal of the conservation groups could have stood in its way.

The difficulty of taking on the state was exemplified by their failure to persuade the OPW to abandon its plans for a horrendous modern office block within the precincts of Dublin Castle. Conservationists had expected that the OPW would respect the medieval-classical mix of the castle, but they were shattered when the scheme was unveiled in 1968. As designed by Frank du Berry, one of the OPW's senior architects, the new four-storey block could not have been more unsympathetic. Violently horizontal in emphasis, with projecting balustrades on the upper floors, it seemed to have been inspired by the kind of hotel architecture one would find on the Costa Brava and points south. 'Where is that Mediterranean sun and the bathing towels?', *Plan* inquired derisively when the block was completed in 1973. Two hundred and seventy feet long, it straddles the entire east side of the Lower Yard and quite inexplicably breaks the rectangular layout of the Castle. It is built, as *Plan* noted, of 'a mish-mash of materials – polished granite, bits of brick, concrete and acres of glass' and, in the context of its location, it is an unmitigated disaster.

Yet, long before construction work started in 1970, strenuous representations were made to the OPW by An Taisce, the Irish Georgian Society, the Dublin Civic Group and even the RIAI. Dublin Corporation also expressed its dismay, but they were all fobbed off with the argument that 'preparatory work' on the design of the building had been under way since 1955 – itself an indication of how slowly the state moves – and it was now 'too late' to change the plans. There had been 'prolonged discussions' with the Revenue Commissioners, whose Stamping Branch would occupy the building, and the project had also been delayed by cutbacks

in capital expenditure. But apart from one minor adjustment – the omission of a link 'bridge' between the new block and the eighteenth-century range facing the Chapel Royal – the OPW stuck rigidly to its plans. In this, the state's officials were guilty of the most extraordinary double standards. After all, they had faithfully restored the State Apartments and reconstructed the cross-block separating the Upper and Lower Castle Yards in facsimile. Nobody was arguing for the retention of the motley collection of stable buildings which had stood on the Stamping Branch site. But if there was ever a case for clever pastiche rather than harsh modern architecture, this was it.

The OPW's intransigence over the Dublin Castle development came as something of a blow to those who had been arguing strongly that the state should build its own office blocks instead of renting acres of space from the private sector. Such a strategy would certainly have made much more sense in the long-term, but governments are notorious for their persistent failure to take a long-term view. It was abundantly clear that the state's growing army of civil servants would need modern office accommodation, yet the provision of this space received no priority and even less consideration. Several politicians had friends in the property sector whose fortunes depended on a steady supply of state tenants and, in any case, it could be argued that scarce capital resources had to be spent on housing, hospitals, roads and schools. But the biggest bulwark against any move to invest in office development was the Department of Finance, which controlled the purse-strings. For the Department's mandarins, it was so much easier to write down a fairly modest figure for rent every year than to commit large amounts of capital on construction projects.

This was the height of folly. In the first place, rents were bound to increase at least as fast as inflation, and the overall figure would rise exponentially as the state agreed to lease more and more office space. Thus, in the decade to 1973, the annual outlay on office rentals in Dublin increased from only £200,000 to more than £1.5 million. But in the following decade, ending in 1983, the bill being footed by the taxpayer had shot up to £15 million. The second important fact

overlooked by the Department of Finance was that most private developers did not actually invest capital in their office blocks; they borrowed the money at favourable interest rates and made their profit by selling the finished product to an institutional investor. The government had access to even more diverse sources of finance and could easily have raised money to build its own office blocks. Thus, instead of falling into the hands of insurance companies and pension funds, many of Dublin's modern buildings could have become the permanent assets of the state.

The position is analagous to that facing ordinary people in weighing up the advantages of buying or renting a house. If they decide to buy, it generally means paying off a mortgage over a period of twenty years but, at least they *own* the house. By contrast, renting makes no sense at all; in the end, they leave with nothing more than their suitcases and a few sticks of furniture. For the state, the economics are even more questionable. According to the most recent figures, the average construction cost of office projects undertaken by the OPW was £390 per square metre compared with annual rental costs of £76 per square metre. On that basis, the 'payback' period would be just a little over five years. Yet when the state rents an office block, it is normally locked into a lease for thirty-five years and, in the end, it is left with nothing more than the desks and filing cabinets.

But there is an even greater lunacy inherent in the state's predilection for leasing rather than building office space. The rent it pays out every year for the blocks occupied by civil servants helps to underwrite pension policies throughout the private sector. At the same time, astonishingly, the state itself makes no provision for the pensions of its own employees. No fund of provident investments has been built up over the years to cover the state's liability to pay the index-linked pensions of past and present civil servants. Instead, the burden of meeting this ever-spiralling bill – £157 million in 1984 alone – falls on the general body of taxpayers. The government simply makes up the money it needs to pay public service pensions out of its current income from taxation.

By contrast, the banking sector – which knows something

about the value of money – has been nothing if not provident. The two major groups, Bank of Ireland and Allied Irish Banks, don't exactly own their huge head office buildings. Instead, ownership is vested in their respective pension funds, from which the banks lease the office space at the going market rent. And the Bank of Ireland has beefed up its pension fund through the acquisition of such moneyspinners as the Stillorgan Shopping Centre. Even the RIAI brought in some handy extra revenue by building a four-storey slit-windowed office block, to a design by Tyndall Hogan Hurley, in the rear garden of its Merrion Square headquarters. And clever businessmen with an eye to the future, like Dundalk meat baron Larry Goodman, created their own personal pension plans by investing in office developments. Goodman built a fake-Georgian block in Harcourt Street, which is leased to the Department of Foreign Affairs, and bought another block, Griffin House, on Wilton Terrace, where his tenants are the Northern Bank Finance Corporation.

Semi-state companies also had their heads screwed on. As we have seen, the ESB, Bord Bainne, the Sugar Company, Bord Fáilte and the Central Bank all built their own offices. Similarly, the Agricultural Credit Corporation shunned the rental treadmill by providing a new headquarters for itself at the corner of Hatch Street and Harcourt Street. The site had previously been occupied by the Court Laundry, who managed to get planning permission for a major office development there in 1966. Six years later, when the ACC had out-grown its offices in the converted shell of Harcourt Street Station, the Court Laundry site was purchased for a hefty figure and work started soon afterwards on the corporation's new headquarters. The building, designed by Patrick Campbell and Associates, is a rather gloomy marriage of white pre-cast concrete window panels and dark-coloured brickwork, which has become even more desolate with the weather-beaten passage of time. But at least it still represents a major asset to the ACC.

Back in 1969, it seemed as if the government was coming to its senses. Plans were announced for the largest single office block ever built in Dublin and, for once, the state was involved. A substantial sum had been contributed towards the ac-

quisition of a large site straddling Kildare Place, behind the Shelbourne Hotel, and a massive eight-storey building, which would provide no less than four acres of office space for the Department of Agriculture, was to be built there. It was a huge project, and *Plan* felt it would 'set a headline' for the state's future office requirements. But the then Minister for Finance, Charles Haughey, seemed anxious to assure property developers that the government's involvement in this scheme 'did not imply a general decision in favour of purchase rather than renting'. He told the Dáil that consideration had not been given to the possibility of purchasing any more large new office building and he also pointed out that the Kildare Place project had a number of 'unusual features' regarding its location, planning and the terms of the lease.

Certainly, the design of Agriculture House was unusual. Despite its great bulk, the architects – Stephenson Gibney and Associates – succeeded in making it look much less monstrous than its amazingly high 5 : 1 plot ratio would suggest. The building consists of a centre block separated by lift and staircase towers from two 'wings', one of which faces Kildare Street. Some idea of its size may be gleaned from the fact that almost seven hundred massive pre-cast modules were used in the construction of the walls but, here again, the choice of honey-coloured Armagh limestone aggregate has minimised the impact of the building and given it a mellow look. Even the entrance foyer is immense. Fully two storeys high, it was designed to permit the high-spending Department of Agriculture to mount regular exhibitions aimed at showing taxpayers where their money goes.

By far the most unusual feature of the building is the lease and, if the Department really wanted to show taxpayers how their money is spent, it should set aside a glass case where this extraordinary document could be placed on permanent exhibition. For in Kildare Place, the state was taken for a very expensive ride indeed. Basically, what happened was that John Laing, the big British construction firm, jumped in ahead to acquire the former Church of Ireland training college, which had stood on the site. As far back as 1963, Laing had got planning permission to replace this decorative Victorian building with an eight-storey office block. When

the state arrived on the scene six years later with notions of taking over the project, Laing struck a hard bargain. The government would have to make a contribution of £500,000 towards the site acquisition costs, Laing itself would get the £1.4 million building contract and, by means of a 'hire purchase' deal the state would eventually own the office block.

But this complicated arrangement didn't quite explain the central role of a well-known property personage at the topping-out ceremony on 11 May 1972. For it was Michael Lucey, property investment manager of Irish Life, who symbolically placed the last pour of structural concrete on the roof. The explanation for this curious turn of events was shatteringly simple. The government had made a critical error of monstrous proportions. Instead of buying out Laing's interest in the site and paying for the construction of the building out of its own funds, it had brought Irish Life in on the deal. Thus, it was Irish Life which put up the money to pay off Laing and, in return, they acquired the freehold title to the building. Ownership would of course revert to the state, not in fifteen or twenty years, as one might have expected, but after a period of *one hundred and fifty years*. And so, until the year 2123 – if Agriculture House is still standing by then – Irish Life will be milking taxpayers for the rent. It would be impossible to calculate how much the company will take in over such a long period of time. Suffice it to say that by 1984, just eleven years after the building was completed, Irish Life was already collecting as much in rent *per year* as it cost to build in the first place.

The fact that Agriculture House became a goldmine for Irish Life's policy-holders is a tribute to the naiveté of the civil servants who agreed to this incredible deal. They give every sign of knowing nothing about the economics of office development and, instead of hiring competent professionals to advise on these matters, they have muddled along in their ignorance, leaving the state to become easy prey for the pirhanas of the property world. At the same time, the OPW has stubbornly refused to comply with Dublin Corporation's declared policy on inner city renewal. Thus, not one of the office blocks developed by the state itself or by any of the semi-state companies is located on the neglected northside.

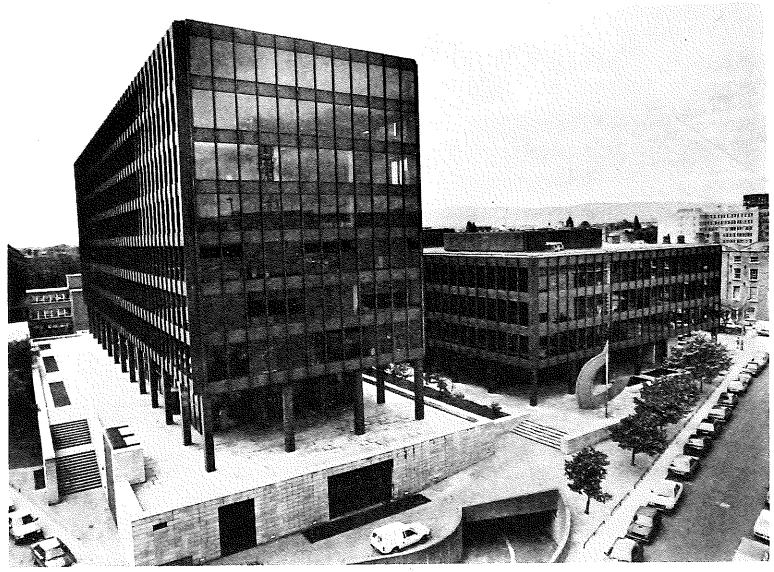
And if these public servants weren't even prepared to venture across the River Liffey, there was almost no chance of decentralising state office employment to provincial cities like Cork, Limerick or Galway. 'The old school tie linkage between the wheeler-dealer galaxy of developers, auctioneers, architects, financiers, heads of the civil service and last, but by no means least, the politicians themselves has combined to thwart and defeat whatever shadowy intentions the government ever had in respect of a regional policy', said *Plan* in 1972. Indeed, one of the major stumbling blocks, apart from a natural resistance to change, was the utterly unreal demand from the financial institutions that their rental returns on a provincial office block should be exactly the same as they would get in a 'prime' Dublin area such as Ballsbridge.

Take the case of Bord Iascaigh Mhara, the state's sea fisheries development board. In the late 1970s, its chairman and chief executive, Brendan O'Kelly, thought it would be a good idea for BIM to move its headquarters from Ballsbridge to a fishing port. Various sites were examined in Killybegs, Dungarvan and Galway but, in the end, the board decided to 'decentralise' to Dun Laoghaire – less than five miles from its offices in Hume House. There was, of course, a reason for this laughable decision. The site of the proposed new headquarters at Crofton Road, overlooking Dun Laoghaire harbour, was 'sold' to O'Kelly and the then Minister for Fisheries, Brian Lenihan, by politically well-connected developers, Brian and Tony Rhatigan, who had been sitting on it since 1972. Through a company called Starling Securities, they had bought the site for about £60,000 and got planning permission in the same year for a five-storey office block, designed by John Graby, their favourite architect. But the Rhatigans played it safe; they weren't going to go ahead with this building until they had some guarantee of letting it. So they sat back and waited patiently for a good fairy to make their dreams come true.

The Rhatigans had learned the hard way. They became involved in the Dublin property scene by building Iveagh Court for Jim Stafford and then moving on to develop Fenian House, a rude little office block in Fenian Street, which they let to the Department of Posts and Telegraphs and later sold

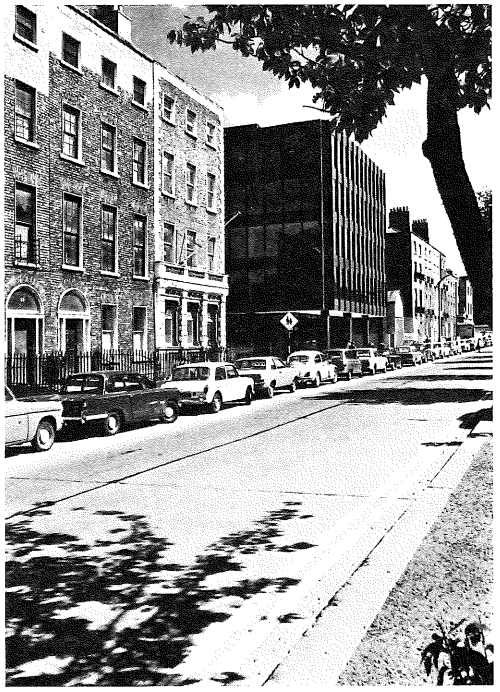
to Trinity College. By the time this block was finished in 1972, the brothers were 'bursting with development ideas', as *Hibernia* reported, and they attracted the attention of Slater Walker, the controversial British investment vehicle whose asset-stripping operations had become part of the unacceptable face of capitalism. Several joint companies were set up – with registered offices at Haughey Boland and Co. in Amiens Street – and Slater Walker agreed to lend them £5 million to develop a selection of sites. But if the London men were hoping to hit the jackpot in Ireland, they were badly mistaken. Indeed, their brief sojourn here turned out to be disastrous. High-priced sites bought up in boom times had to be sold off at huge losses when the market collapsed in 1974 and Slater Walker decamped shortly afterwards. Suitably chastened, the Rhatigans lived to fight another day. They bought the condemned Scotch House on Burgh Quay and built a hideous mock-Georgian office on the site, replete with aluminium sash windows and a multi-level 'Mansard' roof. Designed by John Graby, it was let to the Department of Posts and Telegraphs and then sold to Irish Pension Fund Unit Trust. And in a consortium with the Investment Bank of Ireland and the McMullan brothers, of Maxol Oil fame, the Rhatigans built over five hundred houses in the grounds of Castletown House. Indeed, they still have hopes of covering Castletown's wooded acres with two thousand more houses – if they ever get planning permission.

But with the BIM office block in Dun Laoghaire, the Rhatigans had a sure-fire winner. Incredibly, before construction work even started in 1979, BIM signed a draft agreement to lease the whole building for thirty-five years. Thus, at the stroke of Brendan O'Kelly's pen, the risk element associated with most speculative development was entirely removed. Having nailed down their gilt-edged tenant, the Rhatigans could proceed with complete confidence. They spent about £1.2 million on this ghastly addition to Dun Laoghaire's sedate seafront, and then sold it to Irish Life on completion in 1981, reputedly for over £2 million. By then, however, a coalition government had taken office and the new Minister for Fisheries, Tom Fitzpatrick, requested BIM not to move into the building – even though the board was



PETER THURSFIELD

Miesian triumph: the rear elevation of the Bank of Ireland headquarters in Baggot Street, showing how poorly it fits into the Georgian streetscape of the area (*above*).

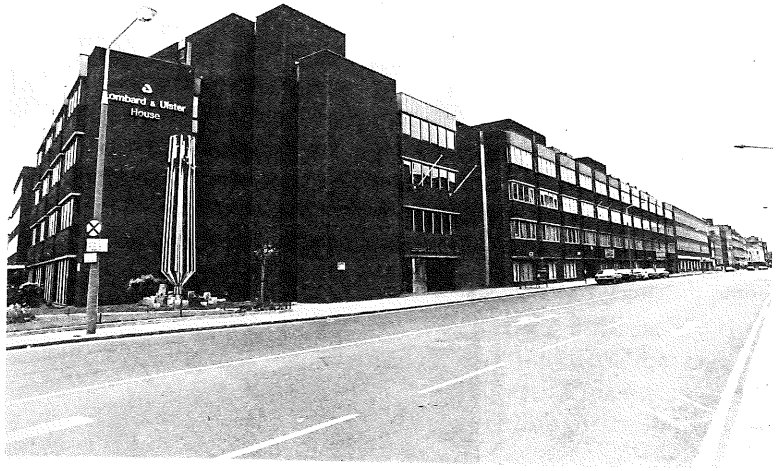


JOHN DONAT

Part of the Georgian terrace on Baggot Street demolished by the Bank of Ireland in 1973 for the second phase of its headquarters, with the first phase already jutting out onto the street (*right*).

IRISH TIMES

Before and after on Lower Mount Street: the terrace of Georgian houses near the corner of Warrington Place in 1969 and (*below*) the Dodder Properties development that replaced them.



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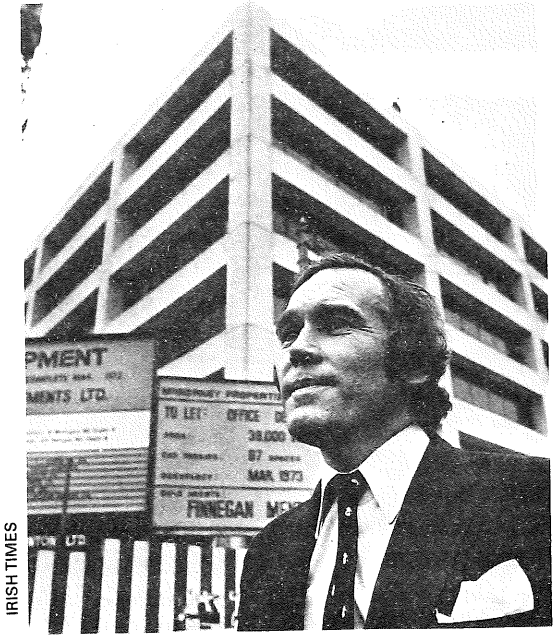
The Gang of Three on Harcourt Road: (*left to right*) Montrose House, the Dodder Properties block and Iveagh Court.

A proud John Finnegan standing in front of the newly-completed McInerney's office block on Grand Canal Street in 1973.



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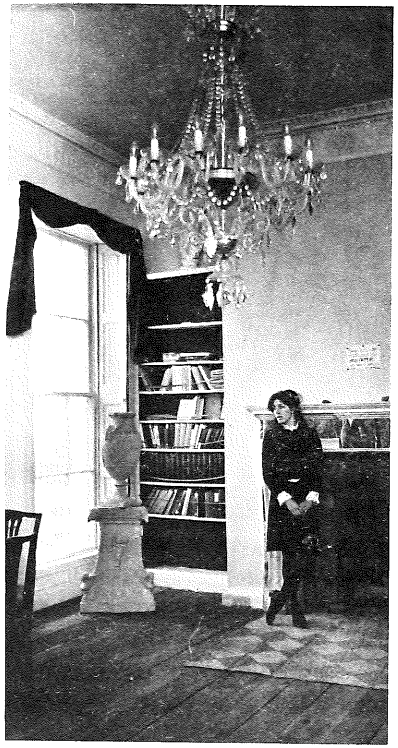

IRISH TIMES

IRISH TIMES

Michael Lucey, property investment manager of Irish Life, in a joyous mood at the company's annual general meeting in May 1985 (*above*).

Mariga Guinness, in the saloon of No. 50 Mountjoy Square, in 1969 (*left*). The house, which she restored, was pulled down with a hawser line in 1982.

PETER THURSFIELD

The bald façade of the ILAC Centre in Moore Street: many of the original buildings it replaced were similar to the shop premises on the left.

already committed to paying out over £200,000 a year in rent. Back in office in 1982, Fianna Fáil reversed Fitzpatrick's decision, and the proposed move was put on ice yet again when the Coalition returned to power later that year. But BIM's efforts to sub-let the building were unsuccessful and, in October 1984, it had no option but to move there itself. By that stage, the board had paid out £600,000 in rent for a building which had remained vacant for three years, and there was still the problem of disposing of its expensive leasehold interest in two floors of Hume House. Only Irish Life – which owns both office blocks – was laughing all the way to the bank. The Rhatigans, of course, had their laugh several years earlier.

More notorious was the case of Bord Telecom, which was severely censured by the Comptroller and Auditor-General for its insistence on leasing 25,000 square feet of space in Merrion House, a three-storey office block built on the former Imco site at Merrion Gates. The problem was that for four years the board employed a total staff of only nine people, yet their accommodation had cost the state over £1.3 million or almost £150,000 *per person*. By contrast, the total bill for accommodating the interim postal board, set up at the same time as Bord Telecom, came to just £1,107 because they were quite content to accept the offer of a modest office in the GPO. For John Kelly TD, this was a scandal, the kind of thing that might have brought down a government twenty or thirty years ago. Members of the Dáil Public Accounts Committee agreed and they sought an explanation from Bord Telecom's embattled chief executive, Tom Byrnes, but he failed to show up at a meeting arranged in March 1984. More than somewhat miffed, the TDs travelled out to Merrion House to interview him and to inspect the board's expensive premises. They got no further than the foyer, however. Byrnes wouldn't let them in to look over his offices and he wouldn't talk to them either, on the grounds that he was 'too busy'.

Some weeks later, Byrnes finally agreed to appear before the committee in formal session to make a strong defence of Bord Telecom. He argued that the problem with Merrion House wouldn't have arisen if there had not been such an

extraordinary delay in launching Telecom Eireann. The 'interim' board had been set up in November 1979, under the chairmanship of Michael Smurfit, Ireland's leading industrialist, but it wasn't until January 1984 – over four years later – that the board was vested with responsibility for running the telecommunications service. This long hiatus was due almost entirely to the frequent changes of government between 1980 and 1983, but it was something that Byrnes, a former IBM executive, and Smurfit found hard to stomach. As men well-used to the fast pace of the private sector, they found it simply incredible that Bord Telecom was allowed to remain a mere shell for so long.

Merrion House, the board's first headquarters, was ill-fated from the beginning. Conceived in 1975 at a time when the office market was in the doldrums, it was to have 75,000 square feet of space on just three floors, each of them almost as big as a football pitch. It was designed by David Keane and Partners for Ravenstone Securities, a Glasgow-based development company controlled by a Greek restauranteur called Reo Stakis. But the architects didn't have the wit to retain the Imco staircase tower, a unique *art deco* landmark, which might have given their new building a badge of distinction. As it was, the layers of pre-cast concrete and, particularly, the vast open-plan office floors dependent on expensive air-conditioning didn't appeal to anyone, and the block remained stubbornly vacant long after it was completed in late 1976.

This was a matter of acute concern to the letting agent, Padraig Hassett, since he had been involved in the Ravenstone scheme from the very outset. But despite his best efforts, he couldn't find a single tenant to take the block off his books. The ground-floor presented particular problems because it was prone to flooding during unusually high tides; indeed, there were even high-water marks on the structural columns. These tell-tale signs were spotted by Jack Storrs, the officer in charge of the Department of Posts and Telegraphs' accommodation branch, when he inspected the building in 1978. Not surprisingly, in view of this and several other 'basic deficiencies', he concluded that Merrion House was entirely unsuitable for letting by the Department. Late in 1979, however, he was asked to have another look at the place because

Bord Telecom had expressed an interest in establishing its headquarters there. Storrs saw no reason to change his verdict but, just in case he might have been mistaken, he requested the OPW to have one of its architects draw up a report on the building. This report confirmed his own, enumerating the deficiencies of Merrion House in some considerable detail.

The strong reservations of the Department and the OPW were made clear to Bord Telecom. Furthermore, the board was supplied with a list of alternative accommodation – deemed suitable by the Department – available for letting at the time. Despite all of this, Bord Telecom insisted on taking the ground-floor of Merrion House. Faced with such intransigence by a fledgling semi-state body, the Department reluctantly signed an agreement to lease 25,000 square feet of space in the building for thirty-five years at an above-average rent of £5.60 per square foot. On top of that, there was a bill of £255,000 for fitting-out costs – described as 'very high by normal standards' in the Comptroller and Auditor General's report – at least a third of it directly attributable to the 'basic deficiencies' in the building.

Thus, what Bord Telecom had done was to take up over half-an-acre of expensive office space in an unsuitable building, against all the advice of its own parent Department and the Office of Public Works, leaving the unfortunate taxpayer to pick up the tab.

The state's management of its own resources has also been lamentably poor, even scandalous. A vast land bank in central Dublin is held by a variety of government departments and semi-state companies, yet much of this property is derelict or under-utilised. The army, for example, still occupies most of the barracks built by the British, though it should be clear even to the most dense senior official in the Department of Defence that some of these barracks – notably Cathal Brugha, in Rathmines – could be safely abandoned, thus releasing the land for housing development. Similarly, CIE has been sitting on an enormous pile of fallow property, despite the fact that the company might have alleviated its own financial problems by unlocking the potential of these valuable assets. There was a glimmer of realism in 1973 when CIE tentatively agreed to combine forces with Irish

Life on a major office development beside Westland Row station, but even this eminently sensible scheme never materialised. Instead, the large site fronting Pearse Street, part of which was occupied by a postal sorting office, has been left to join the ranks of Dublin's eyesores.

It was also in 1973 that the state acquired the old Jameson distillery in Smithfield for a sum in the region of £380,000. The then Minister for Justice, Desmond O'Malley, announced that a new court complex would be built on the three-acre site 'within the next few years'. Following the change of government in March 1973, the new Minister for Finance, Richie Ryan, gave his approval to the OPW to hold a major architectural competition for the design of this complex, which was urgently needed to relieve 'severe congestion' in the Dublin metropolitan courts. Because of the specialised nature of the complex and its 'significance as a public building', it was felt – quite rightly – that a competition was the most appropriate way of securing the best possible design. No such competition was ever held. Instead, the red-brick Victorian distillery buildings were allowed to become a playground for vandals and it was only in 1984 that a much scaled-down version of the scheme was reactivated. By contrast, after moving their distillery operations to Midleton, Co. Cork, Irish Distillers lost no time in creating a highly-imaginative new headquarters from the shell of an old spirits store adjoining their abandoned Smithfield buildings. The new building, one of the first attempts in Dublin at architectural 'recycling', was designed by Finn Behncke and Toal O'Muire, of Brian O'Halloran and Associates. More ironic was the fact that their old headquarters in Bow Street, right behind the vandalised distillery, was later leased by the state to provide 'temporary' overflow accommodation for the Land Registry.

The OPW's scandalous waste of its Smithfield property must be attributed to the usual mix of capital cutbacks, political indecision and bureaucratic ineptitude. But it is probably also linked with the state's purchase, in 1976, of the Four Courts Hotel, on Inns Quay. Plans were drawn up for court accommodation and offices but, here again, the state dragged its feet while the property fell into rack and

ruin. First, the building was bricked up and then, in 1980, it was demolished. Only a modern extension, built ten years earlier, was retained and the bulk of the site remained derelict until late 1984 when work finally started on a 70,000 square foot office block. And though the OPW employs over one hundred qualified architects, all of them in receipt of handsome state salaries, this project was farmed out to a private firm, Henry J. Lyons and Partners. Indeed, it is standard practice for the OPW to give such important commissions to outside architects on the patently spurious grounds that its own staff are 'too busy' designing schools, post offices, garda stations and the like.

Even more bizarre was the debacle over the four-acre Jacob's site at Bishop Street. In a major blow to inner city employment, the long-established biscuit firm moved out to Tallaght in 1976 and sold its old factory for just over £1 million to a British company called Property Security Investment Trust. Less than two years later, these speculators almost recouped their entire 'investment' by selling less than a third of the site to the OPW for £800,000. What the state had purchased was a modern office and warehouse building on the Bride Street frontage, which was intended for use as a stationery store. But instead of proceeding immediately with this project, the OPW left the premises vacant and unguarded for more than six years. Like the Jameson distillery, it soon became a vandals' playground. Every single window was smashed and the walls were daubed with graffiti, even at parapet level – seven storeys above the street. Indeed, by the time the OPW finally started work on the building in late 1984, it was in a ruinous state, requiring major additional expenditure of taxpayers' money to put right.

Meanwhile, the remainder of the old Jacob's factory had been reduced to little more than a bomb site. Everything was demolished apart from the distinguished Victorian buildings at the corner of Bishop Street and an infill modern office block, which was left with its Venetian blinds gnashing through broken windows. Late in 1981, the British speculators put their holding up for sale. At the time, nearby Kevin Street College was desperately in need of extra accommodation, yet the City of Dublin VEC stupidly allowed the Jacob's site to

fall through their fingers. It was snapped up at the bargain price of £750,000 by the Rhatigan brothers. Less than six months later, the VEC agreed to buy it for £1.25 million – giving the Rhatigans an instant profit of half a million pounds at the taxpayers' expense. Not surprisingly, the VEC then discovered that it couldn't afford to develop the site, so another expensive investment by a public body was allowed to waste away.

Which brings us back to the Central Bank, or at least to the potentially delightful area under its menacing shadow. For many, this maze of narrow streets decked out with old and often decrepit buildings could be Dublin's answer to Greenwich Village in New York or the Marais quarter of Paris. Full of charm and character, it has already developed a Left Bank atmosphere, with an array of 'alternative' shops, cafés, clubs and galleries. But the area is blighted by derelict sites, vacant buildings and needless road-widening schemes, and its spontaneous revival is also under serious threat from CIE. Since the mid-1970s, the company has been systematically acquiring large tracts of land on both sides of the quays for a mammoth 'transportation centre', which is intended to serve as a terminus for all bus services in the city as well as linking up underground with the proposed rapid rail system – if it's ever built. On the southside, this all-embracing scheme would gobble up the entire area bounded by Fownes Street and Eustace Street, Dame Street and Wellington Quay. Yet although the rapid rail system on which the whole idea depends has been officially long-fingered, CIE has been pursuing its property acquisition programme – apparently without any government approval. Thus, until somebody in authority takes a final decision one way or the other, this area is likely to remain frozen in a planning limbo, with all that means in terms of dereliction and decay.

But CIE is not the only guilty party. The most obvious and regrettable class of 'development' in the area is surface car parking. Over the years, literally dozens of old buildings have been demolished to make way for these private car parks, which are simply derelict sites by another name. By far the largest is on Sycamore Street, opposite the stage door of the Olympia Theatre, where half-a-dozen quite sound buildings

were swept away in the late 1960s by Esco Ltd, a company controlled by two businessmen, Abraham and Clement Esses, who came here from Britain during World War II. In 1979, they sought to extend this festering eyesore by demolishing the old Brindley's printing works in Eustace Street, but the Corporation firmly refused permission. This building, with its ornate stucco facade, is among the oldest in the city. Erected in 1728 as a Presbyterian Church, it is also one of the few buildings in the vicinity of the Central Bank which are listed for preservation. Since 1976, however, its fabric has been steadily deteriorating because Esco's only interest is in getting their hands on the site; indeed, they spurned a tentative offer from An Taisce to purchase the property, citing 'plans' for an office development there at some indefinable time in the future. Even Allied Irish Investment Bank appears quite prepared to play this waiting game. Last year, the bank made a decidedly negative contribution to the revival of the area by getting permission to 'develop' yet another surface car park, at the corner of Crown Alley and Temple Bar. One would have thought that bankers had something more worthwhile to do with their money.

The public authorities have not helped either. Apart from the dire threat inherent in CIE's plans, the area could be decimated entirely if the Corporation goes ahead with its totally unnecessary road-widening schemes for Eustace Street, Fownes Street, Temple Bar and Essex Street, not to mention the south quays. The state, too, has shown its insensitivity to the character of the area by making full use of its exemption from planning control. Crown Alley telephone exchange is a fine Gothic-style red-brick building, designed by Thomas Manly Deane and completed in 1897. But when the Department of Posts and Telegraphs built a five-storey extension in 1973, they merely illustrated how architectural standards have degenerated since Deane's day. Indeed, the new addition is so devoid of detail that it has nothing more than a blank brown-brick wall towering over the exquisite Georgian and Victorian buildings of Anglesea Street.

The contribution of the Department of Justice was more insidious. The Dolphin Hotel in Essex Street was another Gothic revival building, of the same vintage as Crown Alley

exchange. Its closure in 1966 was a great loss to the area, and subsequent attempts to revive it as an entertainment centre met with little success. In 1975, after being empty for some years, the building was acquired by solicitor Gerry Hickey through Crane Holdings, which was controlled by one of his offshore companies, this time in the Channel Islands. Hickey wanted to demolish the Dolphin for an office development, but he was eventually persuaded to build the offices behind the existing facade. Significantly, the planning permission provided for a public house on the ground floor. But when the Department of Justice agreed to lease the offices in 1982, it simply dispensed with this facility. The Department didn't want to cohabit with a common public house and, though it was only renting the building, there was nothing anyone could do to challenge this decision because it was covered by Section 84 of the Planning Act. And so, the Dolphin became just another dead office block because that's the way our public servants wanted it.

Eleven

'The Minister says that the houses could not be restored at reasonable cost. That phrase is a gift to every unscrupulous developer in Dublin, who will ensure – by organising the wilful damage himself – that the properties he has his eye on cannot be restored at reasonable cost.'

Jimmy Tully was a holy terror. He may not have been a born fixer but, in the great tradition of Irish politics, he spent much of his life 'fixing' things for people. He had a humble start himself as the second youngest of a family of ten, the son of a farm labourer from a townland near Kells, Co. Meath. His education was fairly basic and, after leaving school, he worked as a grocery assistant before joining the army on the outbreak of the Emergency. He rose to the rank of corporal – like Napoleon and Hitler, as he would point out later – and when he was demobbed in 1946 he got a job as a labourer, mixing concrete on the site of Butlin's holiday camp at Mosney.

Tully's father had been a staunch trade unionist and, not unexpectedly, the young man also immersed himself in the labour movement. He joined the Federation of Rural Workers and, within six months, he was the area organiser for Co. Meath. By 1954, he had become the union's general secretary – a position he would hold for almost two decades – and in the same year he was elected as Labour deputy for his home county. Though he lost his Dáil seat three years later, his membership of Meath County Council kept him in touch with the grassroots and he regained it in 1961. From then on, he rose steadily through Labour's ranks and, by 1972, he was deputy leader of the parliamentary party. In March 1973, after the election of a Coalition government, Liam Cosgrave

appointed him to serve as Minister for Local Government.

In terms of planning, Tully was the worst Minister for Local Government in the history of the state. Almost every county in Ireland is littered with the consequences of his decisions. During his reign in the Custom House, he persistently rejected the advice of his own planning advisers. One of his officials has vivid recollections of Tully's *modus operandi*. 'You would be standing in front of his desk arguing that such-and-such an appeal should be rejected out of hand on all sorts of planning grounds, but he would just sit there, smiling malevolently at you, while he signed an order granting permission', he said. 'Almost every appeal that came from Meath was granted, especially for bungalows in the countryside, because he apparently saw this as part of a service for his constituents.' As a gutsy anti-intellectual, Tully had no time for planners and their often abstruse arguments. What he loved to see in rural areas at night-time, he once said, were 'the lights at the end of the lane'.

Tully once defined a good politician as one who 'knows what the people who elect him want and what the country wants'. He himself was nothing if not assiduous in looking after his constituents. While serving as Minister for Local Government, he ran a string of 'clinics' in Co. Meath, helping them with their problems. In the 1977 general election, when he polled less than 6,000 votes, he was totally mystified. After all, hadn't he helped more than twice that number in his 'clinics', so why didn't they vote for him?

A regular church-goer who neither drank nor smoked, Tully once boasted that, under his stewardship, the Department of Local Government would never be the same again. 'This is the first time that the Custom House has been really open to anyone and everyone', he declared in 1975. What totally demoralised his own officials, however, was the fact that Tully's door seemed to be open to the wrong sort of people as far as development and planning was concerned. In fact, his four years in office marked the very nadir of planning in Ireland. He appeared willing to grant permission for almost any development, no matter how appalling in itself and no matter what dreadful precedent it would create. Years later, local authority planners, especially in Dublin, would still be

trying to cope with the fall-out from what became known as 'Tully permissions' – the inexplicable decisions made by the Minister who called himself a socialist. The five-storey office block at the corner of Eglinton Road in Donnybrook is Tully's most notorious memorial, but an examination of his record would show that it was merely the tip of a very large iceberg indeed.

It all looked very different back in 1973 when the Coalition came to power after sixteen years of Fianna Fáil rule. There had been widespread unease about the role of successive Ministers for Local Government in deciding planning appeals. Because thousands, even millions of pounds can turn on a single planning decision, it was felt that the system was open to abuse or, at the very least, to influence of the wrong kind. Tully was just as aware of this public perception as anybody else and, within three months of taking office, he announced that a Bill providing for the transfer of appellate jurisdiction to an independent tribunal was 'almost ready'. However, another three years passed before the 1976 Planning Act became law, and it wasn't until March 1977 that the new statutory body, An Bord Pleanala, assumed responsibility for dealing with planning appeals. In the meantime, Tully continued to exercise the same powers as his predecessors, though with much more devastating results.

At the outset of his term of office, he actually endeared himself to conservationists. In a celebrated speech in December 1973, he said he wanted 'to see Dublin develop as a living city, with the people coming back to its centre'. He pledged that a 'special effort' would be made to build more housing in the inner city and, at the same time, he would ensure that the value of this 'costly investment' would not be diminished by a substantial loss of older houses in the area. It was this ministerial initiative that produced a radical change in Dublin Corporation's policy. No longer would almost everyone on the housing list be consigned to live in the outer suburbs; in future, the Corporation would build a much larger proportion of its total housing output in the inner city. Even more radical was the change in the form of this housing. Monolithic multi-storey blocks of flats of the type built throughout the 1960s gave way to terraces and courtyards of real homes, where

everyone would have their own front door and even a patch of garden. Beginning in the Coombe, where local people had been fighting a rearguard action against plans to depopulate the Liberties area, the Corporation embarked on a major house-building programme which helped to restore life to parts of the city that would otherwise have died. And though it was Tully who set the ball rolling, much of the credit must go to James Molloy, the Corporation's first housing co-ordinator, who found this new role a welcome relief after several years in the planning department's hot seat.

Tully failed to keep his side of the bargain, however. He did very little to stem the tide of destruction and, time after time, his appeal decisions paved the way for speculators intent on replacing sound houses with office blocks. In one well-publicised case, he ignored a petition from over 2,000 people – including cabinet colleague Garret FitzGerald – and granted permission in September 1973 for the demolition of houses in Fenian Street which had been the focus of controversy for over a year. 'The Minister says that the houses could not be restored at reasonable cost', *Plan* magazine noted. 'That phrase is a gift to every unscrupulous developer in Dublin, who will ensure – by organising the wilful damage himself – that the properties he has his eye on cannot be restored at reasonable cost.'

The Fenian Street houses were owned by a £3 company called Jason Holdings, which was jointly controlled by Killiney merchant John McEntagart, medical doctor Kibon Aboud and solicitor Donald Pratt. They had acquired the property in 1972 and got rid of several sitting tenants by re-housing them elsewhere. A few weeks before Christmas, five families from the Fenian Street area moved into one of the vacant houses and carried out some repairs to make it more habitable. But Jason refused to accept rent, cut off their gas and electricity and then employed a demolition crew to strip off part of the roof 'without so much as a "How d'ye do?" to the families living directly underneath', as *Hibernia* reported at the time. Six months later, the squatters were evicted on foot of a High Court order and, with the support of Sinn Féin (Gardiner Place), forerunner of the Workers Party, they camped on the footpath to draw attention to their plight. But

the Corporation refused to re-house them on the grounds that this would 'cause a rash of pavement squatting by everyone in need of a house'.

Two weeks after Tully made his controversial decision, Jason Holdings demolished the houses and then sought permission for an 'office and residential development' on the site. At an oral hearing in June 1974, Donald Pratt claimed that the 'executive-type flats' which his company planned to build would 'more than replace' the accommodation that had been lost. In fact, neither Pratt nor his associates built anything there. Despite getting a permission from Tully, Jason Holdings erected nothing more than an advertising billboard and later sold the site to Stillorgan Securities, which was accumulating quite a raft of property in the Fenian Street area. This company was the vehicle of John Murphy and Tony Vaughan, who would later play a leading role in the controversial Donnybrook office block. But again, despite numerous planning applications and numerous permissions, they too failed to proceed with any development. In 1982, ten years after Jason Holdings first appeared on the scene, the much-enlarged derelict site was sold to Abbey Properties, who are unlikely to do anything, at least until the property market improves. Meanwhile, Donald Pratt re-surfaced in Bachelors Walk where – in the company of Ken Wall, managing director of Lombard and Ulster – he got planning permission for another office development on a semi-derelict site adjoining Murph's restaurant. But this, too, failed to materialise and, for a time, the site became a favourite haunt for glue-sniffing itinerant children.

Then there was the peculiar case of Percy Place, where insurance broker Brendan Flynn had high hopes of making himself a millionaire – at the expense of local residents, of course. What made it so peculiar was that his path to a potential fortune had been cleared by Corporation planners in 1971 when they zoned the area for 'general business'. But the triangle formed by Percy Place, Haddington Road and the line of Huband Bridge was overwhelmingly residential and their dab of blue crayon on the zoning map inevitably meant the loss of twenty-six sound houses. Indeed, in typically high-handed fashion, the planners didn't bother to consult the

people who lived there about the fate of their homes. Their first clue that something dreadful was happening came just six months later when Brendan Flynn launched his frontal assault on the area. At first, local residents didn't even know who their enemy was because Flynn and his associates had armoured themselves with a battery of front companies, trading under names like Drumkill Estates, Euro Estates and Brendan James Properties. Through these fronts, Flynn began assembling his site by buying out the interests of a handful of people who owned several properties in the area – over the heads of their tenants. As *Hibernia* later reported, those who parted earliest with their holdings received least compensation. Owner-occupiers of long standing who persisted with their objections got a substantial price for their homes, especially on Haddington Road, where Flynn had to pay a whopping £65,000 for the last house he needed to complete the site.

As usual, the most defenceless casualties of this ruthless profiteering were the elderly tenants, some of whom had been living in the area for fifty years or more. They were left entirely at the mercy of the speculators when the Corporation approved plans by Flynn's companies to demolish nineteen of the twenty-six houses he had 'assembled'. Every imaginable device was used to get rid of them. One old man was 'offered' alternative accommodation in a house that didn't exist, others were given miserly handouts of £600 to leave and those who held out were continually harassed so that their lives became intolerable. One 78-year-old tenant on Haddington Road had a heart attack when he saw a horse looking out from an upstairs window of the house next door. It was occupied by itinerants, who were allegedly supplied with drink – to keep the pot boiling, as it were. The poor man died in hospital, having received not a penny in 'compensation' for his trouble. By the time an oral hearing was held in October 1974 on Drumkill's plans for an office development, only a handful of the houses on the site were still standing. The case was bitterly fought by the Living City Group and Sinn Féin (Gardiner Place) as well as former Fianna Fáil Lord Mayor Sean Moore and other local politicians, but the commercial zoning of the area had sealed its fate. None

of them could do anything more than fulminate when Tully confirmed the Corporation's decision to grant permission for the scheme.

But for Brendan Flynn and his associates, the decision had come too late. His British partners, Lane Fox, had been forced into liquidation by the collapse of the property market and his own financial backers – the Canadian Royal Trust Company and the Ulster Investment Bank – were looking for their pound of flesh. They were owed more than £600,000 and eventually recouped it when the bulk of the Percy Place site was sold in 1978 to Abbey, the publicly-quoted property group run by Matt Gallagher's brother James, one-time Fianna Fáil TD for Sligo/Leitrim. Through its various subsidiaries, Abbey had become one of the largest house-building firms in the Dublin area and it was also involved in large-scale property speculation. Indeed, the Percy Place purchase may have been financed by re-mortgaging its four-acre site at Earlsfort Terrace, which had been lying derelict since 1972. Gallagher and his family had put this site together in the late 1960s and early 1970s first by acquiring the Sacred Heart Convent in Lower Leeson Street and, later, Alexandra College in Earlsfort Terrace. The college occupied a fine ensemble of Victorian buildings, but these were swept away in 1972 and, two years later, planning permission was obtained from Tully's sidekick, parliamentary secretary Michael Begley, for a massive office development on the site. By then, of course, the market had collapsed and the whole scheme was put on Abbey's back-burner for several years. But even in difficult times, the property was a veritable goldmine for the Gallaghers. Their acquisition costs were no more than £700,000. By 1980, however, the value of the site was estimated at £7 million. Thus, even though it was one of the city's major eyesores, strewn with rubble and overgrown with weeds, the Earlsfort Terrace site was Abbey's most bankable asset, and it was mortgaged and re-mortgaged several times over to finance developments elsewhere.

And so, in Percy Place, Abbey built four blocks of offices and two blocks of luxury flats to a design prepared by Austin Murray, who had been the architect for Brendan Flynn's various schemes. The offices, all 100,000 square feet of them,

came on stream in 1980-81, just in time to cash in on a major letting boom, and Abbey made several million pounds by selling off the four blocks to financial institutions like Hibernian Insurance and Norwich Union. That profit might have been Flynn's, had the dice fallen his way. He tried to make a new career for himself by publishing a free-sheet called the *Dublin Advertiser* and when that failed he drifted into selling time-share apartments in the Canary Islands through Sunshare International. In August 1984, he was arrested by Spanish police on suspicion of involvement in the murder of his Belgian business partner and was promptly incarcerated without charge in the prison at Las Palmas. He resorted to the peculiarly Irish tactic of a hunger strike. The Spaniards, however, were unimpressed. Meanwhile, the undeveloped portion of his Percy Place site fell into the hands of Anguilla-registered Kingsnorth Bank International, an off-shore investment vehicle set up by Cork businessman Timothy Murphy, who was described by the BBC as a 'leprechaun-like figure' in a televised exposé of his activities in December 1984.

Meanwhile, Jimmy Tully continued to find himself in hot water over his increasingly bizarre planning decisions. In May 1975, he granted retrospective permission for a half-finished bungalow at a well-known beauty spot near Glencullen, in the Dublin mountains – despite the fact that the owner had built it without the county council's permission, had been fined in court for breaking the law and had then defied an order to demolish it. Conservationists were appalled, accusing the Minister of making a mockery of the Planning Act. If he was prepared to legitimise an illegal development in a designated high amenity area, then why should anyone bother to seek planning permission for anything? Tully's attempt to justify his extraordinary decision did not reassure them. 'As far as I saw that, it was an opportunity for someone who had never owned a house to own their own house', he said later. And in a virulent attack on 'elitist groups' who thought they had a monopoly on truth, he declared: 'I am following policies in relation to planning control which command the support and approval of the great mass of the general public.'

But if the Glencullen case was an example of the type of decision Tully was quite prepared to make in the full glare of

publicity, what of the many decisions which received no media coverage at all? Take the strange case of No. 39 Northumberland Road, where speculators trading as Iansof Investments – of which no trace can be found in the Companies Office – sought permission for a 6,000 square feet office block covering the entire rear garden. This quite outrageous scheme was firmly rejected by the Corporation in July 1976 on the grounds that the area was zoned residential, that the proposed two-storey block would be visually obtrusive, would reduce open space amenity and exceed maximum site coverage standards and that the provision for off-street car parking was inadequate. Undeterred by this comprehensive refusal, Iansof Investments appealed to Tully and, on the advice of his own planning staff, he confirmed the Corporation's decision on 24 November 1976. 'The proposed development, constituting a major intensification of existing office use in an area which is predominantly residential, would be seriously detrimental to the established character of the surroundings', his order read. 'The proposed extension, due to its size, bulk and design, would be visually obtrusive, would result in over-development of the site and would be seriously injurious to the amenities of adjoining residential properties.'

The Minister's decision shocked auctioneers Geoghegan O'Rourke, who were the owners of No. 39 Northumberland Road, because they had been assured that Tully would fix them up. But he didn't realise that they were trading under an assumed name so, when the file arrived on his desk, he failed to make the connection between them and 'Iansof Investments'. Thus reassured, the boyos now felt confident that Tully wouldn't make the same 'mistake' again. Three weeks later, they resubmitted their scheme to the Corporation, using exactly the same set of plans as before, and they were promptly refused permission yet again for exactly the same reasons. But this time, when it went to appeal, the result was quite different. On 14 March 1977, the day before he handed over appellate jurisdiction to Bord Pleanala, Tully granted full planning permission without giving any reasons and without setting down any conditions to reduce the impact of a development which he himself had found so

'seriously injurious' less than four months earlier. And so, at the stroke of Jimmy Tully's ministerial pen, Geoghegan O'Rourke were poised to make a fortune. Of course, they did not carry out this highly dubious development themselves. The permission they had obtained was purely speculative and they cashed in on it later by selling the massively enhanced property at a fat profit to the Abbey Group, which built the back-garden office block as its new headquarters.

Tully once said that life would be much easier 'if people would look on the bright or amusing side of things'. It would be very hard indeed for the residents of Eglinton Road to look on 'the bright side' of the appalling legacy Tully left to them. And in this case, at least, there was no way the Minister could claim that his decision in favour of a five-storey office block would have the support of 'the great mass of the general public'. Everyone was against it – local people, conservation groups and planning officials as well as the entire membership of the City Council – yet Tully aligned himself, firmly and inexplicably, on the side of the speculators.

No. 2 Eglinton Road was a fine house on a relatively restricted site, sweeping down to the River Dodder at Donnybrook Bridge. Early in 1975, the Corporation received an application under the Housing Act for permission to demolish this house. The application was made by someone called Anthony Walshe, who gave as his address No. 4 Upper Mount Street. At the time, this building was entirely occupied by the Leinster Investment Society, which specialised in laundering money from tax-dodgers through a maze of front companies in Britain, the Isle of Man, the Channel Islands and even Panama. Operating under the guidance of Colm Dunne, who had moved into the friendly society business after he lost control of Anglo-Irish Bank, and George 'Roy' Hand, managing director of the now defunct Everclear Television. L.I.S. invested a fair chunk of its depositors' funds in Dublin property developments during the mid-1970 – though, typically, this was always done through front companies.

Another pointer to its involvement in the Eglinton Road scheme is the fact that the architect was John P. Keenan. He was a director and shareholder, along with Dunne and Hand, in two property companies – Northumberland Holdings

and Ballyheane Investments – which went down with L.I.S. when it collapsed in 1983 with a total loss to depositors of £2 million. Keenan was the architect for Brennan and McGowan's unfinished 'residential community' at Kilnamanagh, in Co. Dublin, and he also designed an ostentatious house near Swords for Ray Burke, the Fianna Fáil TD and one-time Minister for the Environment. In June 1981, the day before Fianna Fáil handed over to a newly-elected Coalition Government, Burke appointed Keenan as a member of Bord Pleanala. Along with other Fianna Fáil appointees, he was removed from office three years later when the appeals board was 'restructured' by the Coalition.

Meanwhile, Dublin Corporation could see no valid reason why any house on Eglinton Road should be demolished and, on 29 April 1975, Housing Act permission was refused. But the L.I.S. interests, with Anthony Walshe still fronting for them, appealed to Jimmy Tully and, in an unusually fast decision, he approved the demolition proposal less than two months later.

In the meantime, Keenan had lodged plans for a five-storey office block, in pre-cast concrete, on the site of the house. This too was flatly refused by the Corporation, in July 1975. The main grounds were that the area was zoned residential, that the devleopment would be visually obtrusive and seriously injurious to its amentity, that it would endanger public safety at a busy traffic junction and that it would encroach on a road-widening line already approved under a Compulsory Purchase Order. In addition, the planners noted, the plot ratio of the office block was excessive, the means of escape in the event of fire were inadequate and there was no provision for landscaping. Despite being so severely rebuffed, Walshe and Keenan re-applied for permission less than three weeks later and the scheme was turned down again for the same reasons as before. But this time, they appealed to Tully and, in February 1976, he granted full planning permission for the office development subject to five relatively minor conditions. The decision was regarded as so outrageous that, for the first time in eight years, the City Council used its powers to revoke it. The revocation order was backed unanimously by councillors of every political persuasion, but

Tully was terrier-like in his determination to facilitate the speculators. And so, on 11 August 1976, he trampled on this expression of civic democracy by rescinding the council's decision. It was, as mild-mannered Sean Moore said at the time, 'a cynical disregard for all town planning ideals and principles'.

With the enormous benefit of its 'Tully permission', the Eglinton Road site was sold later to Stillorgan Securities, who farmed out a 50 per cent share in the development to the Rohan Group. Until then, Rohan had largely steered clear of involvement in the office sector, concentrating instead on industrial construction. Set up in 1964 to churn our system-built bungalows, the company later diversified its operations and, by 1973, its Sitecast subsidiary had become Ireland's leading developer of that planless eczema we know as industrial estates. Even then, its 'boyish' managing director, Ken Rohan, was being described as 'a dynamo of energy, driving frantically from one client meeting to another in his maroon-coloured Jaguar'. By 1979, he could afford to spend a vast sum of money on an ocean-going yacht called 'Regardless', which he skippered in that year's disastrous Fastnet race. Later, he bought Charleville, a Georgian mansion on its own grounds near Enniskerry, and had it expensively refurbished to his own reportedly exquisite taste. Meanwhile, with his slimmed-down workforce and growing stake in buoyant American property, he lives in hope of a return to the rip-roaring days of the early 1970s when developers here were in their element.

By the time Rohan got round to building the Eglinton Road office block in 1981, Tully's permission was in danger of running out under the five-year 'withering' rule laid down in the 1976 Planning Act. But the then Minister, Peter Barry, came to his rescue when he decreed that the validity of all pre-1977 permissions would be extended for a further year. Not long afterwards, the whole legal basis of the office block and numerous other nefarious projects was undermined when, in February 1982, the Supreme Court ruled that Tully never had the power to grant permission for any scheme which contravened the zoning provisions of a local authority development plan. But this impediment was soon cleared up

when Barry's successor, Ray Burke, responded to massive pressure from the development lobby by rushing a new Planning Act through the Dáil. This Act set aside the Supreme Court judgment by conferring retrospective validity on every questionable planning decision made by Tully and his predecessors and, as an added bonus, it extended still further the validity of pre-1977 permissions.

Meanwhile, the Eglinton Road office block was nearing completion, and Ken Rohan's only concession to local feeling was to clad it in brick rather than pre-cast concrete. But whatever the finish, nothing could conceal the fact that it is a monstrous development, a bizarre neighbour for the two-storey house next door, from which it is separated by a gap of less than three feet. This didn't seem to offend Rohan's sensibilities. Nor was he unduly concerned by the fact that the block remained stubbornly vacant long after it was ready for occupation. For Rohan had managed to let all 20,000 square feet to his old pal, Michael Smurfit. He was planning to locate the Smurfit-Paribas banking operation in the building, and then had second thoughts. But he couldn't extricate himself from the 35-year lease and while his faithful estate agent, Padraig Hassett – who handles the lion's share of the Smurfit Group's property work – trawled the depths in search of sub-tenants, Smurfit was left to fork out at least £12,000 a month in rent.

The Eglinton Road block is known as Brook House though, by right, it should have been called after Jimmy Tully, for he was the man who made it all possible. Tully's Follies, as a letter-writer to the *Irish Times* said in 1975, 'constitute accurate and impressive monuments to the philistinism and commercial avarice which are major forces in Ireland today. In time, they will become an important component of the cultural heritage of future generations – scarcely inferior, either aesthetically or in sociological import, to the architecture of Stalinist Russia'. Indeed, Tully's legacy to Dublin might even have encompassed the destruction of the principal Georgian squares if his outrageous decision in one particularly vital test case had not been so vigorously fought by conservationists. In March 1975, during European Architectural Heritage Year, Tully granted full planning permission to Bord na Mona for the demolition of five early nineteenth-

century houses right on the edge of Fitzwilliam Square. He appeared to see no contradiction between this decision in favour of vandalism and the fact that he himself was honorary chairman of the Irish EAHY committee or that, later in the year, he would put his name to the ringing Declaration of Amsterdam, which committed governments to do all in their power to protect the architectural heritage of Europe.

Bord na Mona, the peat development authority, had followed the ESB's example by setting up its headquarters in a Georgian house near Fitzwilliam Square. Over a period of several years, its base had expanded to take in Nos. 28-32 Upper Pembroke Street. But even though the five houses were partitioned and inter-linked, the board wasn't satisfied with the standard of its accommodation. What Bord na Mona really wanted, like the ESB before it, was a modern office block. At the same time, managing director Lewis Rhatigan was in no mood to fight a re-match of the Battle of Fitzwilliam Street. So when the board's architects, Downes Meehan and Robson, sought permission to demolish the Pembroke Street houses, it was on the basis that they would be replaced by an office block with a faithful 'replica' facade. The application was backed up by claims that some of the existing walls were cracked and out of plumb, woodworm had been found in the floorboards and there were even scare stories that some of the board's staff had to put down rat poison in their offices before leaving for home every evening.

But Dublin Corporation was unimpressed and, in July 1974, the scheme was turned down. Mindful of the pastiche travesty in Hume Street, the planners weren't going to make the same mistake again. Bord na Mona's houses, their decision noted, were listed for preservation and were also known to be 'in good condition and well-maintained'. If they were reconstructed, even in facsimile, 'the originality and integrity of these buildings would be destroyed, with consequent injury to the value and amenity of the streetscape in the vicinity of Fitzwilliam Square'. The planners were fully aware of the importance of this decision and, by taking such a firm line, they hoped that developers who were closely watching the case would get the message loud and clear: the Corporation would not tolerate any further assaults on the Georgian core

area. But Bord na Mona wasn't going to take 'no' for an answer, so it lodged an appeal with Tully. The Dublin Civic Group and other conservation interests rowed in behind the Corporation and called on the Minister to hold an oral hearing. He refused. And so, without any of the issues being thrashed out in public, Tully decided to grant permission for the Pembroke Street demolition.

Amid growing controversy, the recalcitrant Minister defended his decision on the basis that there were 'serious structural defects' in the five houses. He mentioned 'sagging floors with very high deflections', serious wall cracks and various other features 'suggesting' structural movement. For Uinseann MacEoin, Tully's reasons were 'tomfoolery, and he knows it'. If these were the criteria, there would not be a case for retaining a single listed building in Dublin. As Kevin B. Nowlan pointed out, the 'faults' enumerated by the Minister could be found in almost every old building. Only developers with an interest in profiting from the destruction of historic architecture could take comfort from Tully's words and he said it was certain that they would now work hard to ensure that his 'criteria' for demolition would apply in other cases. But despite overwhelming evidence from no less than five architects and eight structural engineers that the Bord na Mona houses were sound enough to last for another century, Tully continued to insist that they were 'entirely unsuitable for repair of any kind'.

In November 1975, as the board's staff began vacating their old offices, conservation groups launched a campaign to save the buildings. 'Dublin must not be allowed to become a city of fakes', said An Taisce, the Dublin Civic Group and the Living City Group in a joint statement. 'The preservation or reconstruction of facades is simply not enough. The ultimate issue is the character and meaning of the buildings in the city.' They were supported by the Architectural Association of Ireland and, more significantly, by the council of the RIAI, which had not been heard from since the Hume Street controversy five years earlier. Even more effective was the dramatic intervention of the Arts Council, whose members – all nineteen of them government appointees – called on the Taoiseach to scotch the Pembroke Street scheme. 'We feel it

marks the beginning of the end for the small number of buildings and streets which are the capital's claim to being a city of architectural importance', they declared in an open letter to Liam Cosgrave in January 1976.

Meanwhile, An Taisce had made a £150,000 offer to Bord na Mona on behalf of un-named purchasers who were prepared to maintain and restore the threatened houses. But while the offer was allegedly 'under consideration', the board brought in a demolition crew to begin the task of stripping the houses from the inside. This act of contempt was more than the Arts Council could bear and, when Cosgrave refused to lift a finger, the council took the matter into its own hands. At a special late-night sitting of the High Court in the home of Judge Thomas Doyle, the council got an interim injunction to halt the demolition. 'The action of the Arts Council . . . has given An Taisce the support Blücher brought to Wellington on the field of Waterloo', said the *Irish Times*. 'The services rendered to the community by Bord na Mona are very great; but it must not be allowed to exact as payment the right to deal with houses that embellish the city as if they were untreated bogland'.

In truth, the Arts Council hadn't a leg to stand on because the weight of the law was stacked heavily in favour of Bord na Mona. Tully's planning permission may have been morally questionable, but it was legally valid. And so, when the council's application for a continuing injunction came up for hearing on 20 January, there couldn't have been much doubt about the outcome. Patrick MacEntee SC made a persuasive case that the Pembroke Street houses were a national monument and that to replace them with a modern office block cloaked in a 'Georgian' facade would be equivalent to building 'a Disneyland mock-up of a town in the Wild West'. Judge Liam Hamilton conceded the right of the Arts Council to take action 'to preserve what they and many others regard as our national heritage', but he had to face the fact that Bord na Mona was acting within its legal rights. He refused the council's application.

As news spread through the city that the injunction had been lifted, a group of seventy architecture students from UCD and Bolton Street took possession of the threatened

houses and pledged to resist any attempt at demolition. The buildings were in a shocking mess, with whole floors ripped out and debris strewn everywhere, and the students immediately set about repairing the damage. They received donations of tools and materials, as well as food, and won the public support of every single member of the staff in both schools of architecture. But Bord na Mona remained steadfast, taking out half-page advertisements in the newspapers to explain that its plans provided 'the best practical way of retaining into the future the sole outstanding feature of these houses, i.e. their front facades'. And when Lewis Rhatigan was presented with a petition signed by almost four hundred pupils at King's Hospital School, he reacted by saying that there was 'nothing in the houses worth preserving except the stairs, which would have to be pulled out anyway to make way for a lift'. Indeed, Rhatigan would later joke that, at the height of the controversy, he would gladly have thrown conservationists like Kevin B. Nowlan off the parapets of Pembroke Street!

But Bord na Mona was under intense pressure to drop its demolition plan, with Europa Nostra and even the Council of Europe joining the chorus of protest. Finally, it relented. On 26 April, as the occupation entered its fourteenth week, the board announced that it had agreed to sell the five houses to Allied Irish Investment Bank for a sum in the region of £250,000. The bank pledged that the buildings would be restored in their existing form and it even requested four of the occupying students to remain on as caretakers until this work got under way. Bord na Mona had done well and its change of heart was warmly welcomed. The students had won a famous victory which, as one of them said, had 'given facade architecture one hell of a kick in the teeth'. But the battle would never have needed to be fought if Jimmy Tully had made the right decision at the outset. And his claim that the five houses were 'entirely unsuitable for repair of any kind' was shown to be utterly false when they were restored by AIIB and profitably let as offices to McCann FitzGerald Sutton and Dudley, one of Dublin's largest law firms.

Meanwhile, Bord na Mona was left with a problem. It was renting office space temporarily in Clanwilliam House, but

still hoped to build a new headquarters *somewhere*. Enter John Finnegan, the auctioneer who rarely missed a trick. He approached Lewis Rhatigan and told him about a half-acre site in Baggot Street which had been on his books for some time. Right beside Bord Fáilte and formerly the location of a Christian Science church, it had the advantage of planning permission for a 'ready-to-go' office block. Rhatigan thought this was just the ticket and he agreed to buy it in June 1976 for £500,000 – a record price in the depths of the recession. The Baggot Street site was owned by a consortium which included Finnegan himself as well as his confreres from Marlborough Holdings, Ken O'Reilly-Hyland and Liam McGonagle, and Sam Stephenson. They had been sitting on it since 1972 and, as Stephenson himself said, it was their 'great good fortune' that Bord na Mona finally took it off their hands. He also got the job of designing a new office block, tailored to the board's requirements, and it was completed on schedule in mid-1978. Almost everyone agreed that the building is a remarkably fine example of modern architecture. With dark tinted glazing set in a silvery aluminium curtain wall and granite-clad gables, its most unusual feature is a lean-to pergola of climbing plants, rising from a little 'park' alongside the main entrance. Indeed, it even won an accolade from An Taisce – and Lewis Rhatigan was so chuffed about the way things turned out that he became a firm convert to the cause of conservation and ended up as chairman of the Heritage Trust.

The award from An Taisce was for 'Buildings in Context'. But the context of Bord na Mona's headquarters is surely odd – sandwiched, as it is, between Bord Fáilte's Miesian package on one side and a piece of mock-Georgian dross on the other. This latter office block, one of the worst of its type in Dublin, replaced four fine houses which were the very cornerstone of a terrace extending as far as Fitzwilliam Street. Two of the houses had been occupied for many years by Kenny's advertising agency, while the other two were let in flats. Kenny's apparently owned them too and, late in 1973, they sold the lot to O'Reilly-Hyland family interests. Through Margrave Ltd, of which no trace can be found, they got planning permission in mid-1974 for a 'replica' office block – despite the

fact that all four houses were listed for 'protection'. The Corporation was also under strong pressure from An Taisce, the Living City Group and even Dublin Tourism to keep the houses. However, as *Plan* noted at the time, they had been condemned by Joe McCullough, the structural engineer and former conservationist, who was acting for the O'Reilly-Hyland interests. And so, with their Corporation approval in the bag, they re-sold the site for £900,000 in what one property journalist described as 'the brightest commercial market deal of 1974'. The purchaser was a mysterious offshore company called Pawa Holdings, registered in the Channel Islands to conceal the identity of those involved. Then, in May 1975, while conservationists were still arguing for the retention of the houses, two of them were almost destroyed by an equally mysterious fire. This effectively sealed their fate and, just one month later, Jimmy Tully confirmed the Corporation's decision to approve the office block scheme. As designed by Tyndall Hogan Hurley, the new building is a particularly crude exercise in Georgian pastiche. But Pawa Holdings had little difficulty in letting it to the Federated Union of Employers, and the whole block was sold shortly afterwards, at the usual fat profit, to Irish Life.

The fact that Sam Stephenson had an interest in Bord na Mona's Baggot Street site, as well as being the architect, was not too surprising. Like so many others with money to spare, he had become deeply involved in property speculation during the early 1970s – though this interesting sideline was not exposed until much later. 'Sam had become truculent and increasingly difficult to deal with', one former colleague recalled. 'He couldn't give a damn about the big guys, even Irish Life, and began to think in terms of becoming his own client. That way, he could build what he liked where he liked and fulfil what he saw as his destiny.' There was even something speculative about the striking new office block Stephenson and Gibney built for themselves in Bride Street. Ingeniously hewn out of the shell of the former Molyneaux Chapel, it was designed to house their staff of one hundred in commodious, even exciting surroundings. After the block was completed in 1973, the architects took their profit by selling it to New Ireland Assurance, their partners in the Fitzwilliam

Tennis Club deal, and then leased it back at a favourable rent.

It was his quest for speculative gain that led Stephenson to set up the Grand Canal Syndicate. Formed in 1972, the syndicate included some very interesting bedfellows. Apart from Stephenson and his partner, Arthur Gibney, its members were: Avery Chope, former Dublin manager of Citibank; Joe Malone, then head of Bord Fáilte's North American operation; chartered surveyor Terry Sudway, a former valuer with Dublin Corporation; businessman Vincent Donoghue and two journalists – Frank Cairns, property editor of the *Irish Independent* and Karl Jones, property editor of the *Irish Times*. Apparently, the syndicate went to great lengths to conceal the identity of those involved and only the names of Sudway and Malone's wife Imelda appeared on the files of companies with which it was associated. But the whole affair was flushed out into the open in July 1976 during a High Court action over their failure to complete the purchase of ten acres of land in Wexford for a shopping centre development. Acting for the plaintiff, an Irishman living in Kenya, Colm Condon SC forced the syndicate to disclose the identity of its shareholders – no doubt to the considerable discomfiture of everyone involved, particularly Frank Cairns and Karl Jones.

One of the documents unearthed by Condon revealed that the syndicate had been formed on 2 August 1972, at a meeting attended by Stephenson, Gibney, Chope, Cairns and Jones. They decided it would be called the Grand Canal Syndicate and the shareholdings would be as follows: Stephenson and Gibney, 55 per cent; Cairns, Jones and Donoghue, 35 per cent; Chope, 5 per cent; and Malone and Sudway, 2.5 per cent apiece. The purpose of the syndicate would be to participate in various property transactions and a company called Intercontinental Properties was to be formed. 'This company', the document continued, 'will only be a front for the syndicate, which will effectively own 100 per cent and participate in 100 per cent of the expenses and profits.' Sudway was to be employed full-time in the company offices where the property business would be conducted. 'Malone will be the chairman, but can continue with his present activities. He will provide our camouflage', said the

document. 'It is understood that the highest confidentiality will be expected from each member in order to maximise the potential profitability of the venture. All correspondence is to be addressed to members' homes and on no account to their place of business.'

For Cairns and Jones, the disclosure of their involvement in a secret property syndicate could not have been more embarrassing because it added a new dimension – conflict of interest – to their already questionable property coverage. As regards the latter, *Hibernia* noted at the time, 'the journalism they developed ... has always been especially sycophantic, viewing the world through the eyes of those with vested and often very substantial interests in property development'. In a field riven by controversy, Cairns and Jones had 'contrived to turn out features unruffled by any suggestion that all is not well. Their sources of information are, almost exclusively, the developers and their agents ... Items of news rarely appear in their columns except where those involved have wished it.'

Their pages enjoyed little credibility, especially among chartered surveyors, estate agents and others at the coal-face of the property world. When the market was booming, their hype was at its highest pitch. But even when property was depressed, both Cairns and Jones could be counted on to generate 'confidence' by heralding an 'upswing' in demand, even when there was scarcely a shred of evidence to support it. More curious, however, was the fact that some developments were plugged relentlessly while others were mentioned rarely, if at all. Thus, although their columns were billed as editorial matter, much of the content was little more than thinly-disguised promotional material – more crucial, perhaps, to the letting programme and marketing strategy for new office blocks, shopping centres and apartment buildings than any public relations ploy or paid advertisement.

Similarly, stories which cast property speculation in a poor light were shunned by Cairns and Jones. For example, there was not a line in their property pages about the biggest property story of 1982 – the collapse of the Gallagher Group – even though, as property editors, they might have been expected to be more *au fait* with the background than most of their journal-

istic colleagues. Two years later, when even the dogs in the street knew that one million square feet of vacant office space was overhanging the Dublin market, Cairns and Jones studiously avoided stories which might put the spotlight on this extraordinary phenomenon. Indeed, Jones went so far as to accuse those who drew attention to it of suffering from a form of 'commercial halitosis'.

Cairns, meanwhile, had become somewhat bored by the Dublin scene after serving as a property editor for almost two decades and he contemplated the prospect of joining other expatriates in retirement on Spain's Costa del Sol. Irish visitors to Marbella during the high summer of 1984 were intrigued by an announcement in the local English-language newspaper that Cairns was to become their property editor. At the time of writing, however, he was still working for the *Irish Independent*. Jones, who had started out as his deputy before taking over as property editor of the *Irish Times* in 1968, kept the rather tattered flag flying. Regularly, in times of recession, he would attempt to boost demand for vacant office space by reminding civil servants and other employees of their rights, under the Office Premises Act, to 'decent working conditions'. Once, when asked to comment on how he saw his role, Jones declared, 'I'm a journalist. At the same time, I am unashamedly pro-property. I represent the guys out there driving the bulldozers and investing their money in the future of this country. And contrary to any idle gossip around town, my page is not run like a bawdy house in New Orleans. It's more like Mount Mellary, I can assure you.'

Karl Jones was certainly loyal to his friends in the property world – including Sam Stephenson, his associate from the heady days of the Grand Canal Syndicate. Alone among architects in Dublin, Stephenson was the subject of lead stories in his property page, covering such matters of pressing public interest as the formation of Stephenson Engineering or the merger with a London firm called Stone Toms. Needless to say, the architect's speculative activities were never mentioned, though they received some attention from other print media. In 1979, for example, Stephenson was sued for £1.6 million by Cripps Warburg, a London secondary bank,

in what *Hibernia* termed a 'struggle for control' of the South County Hotel, near Stillorgan. Through Cologne Investments, Stephenson and an anonymous group of investors – apparently the same people as were involved in the Grand Canal Syndicate – had acquired the hotel in 1973 with the aid of a £650,000 loan from the bank. One pointer to the syndicate's participation in this deal was the fact that, two years later, the rates on the hotel were being paid by Intercontinental Properties, whose directors were Terry Sudway and Imelda Malone. However, the loan had been personally guaranteed by Stephenson and when Cripps Warburg sought repayment in 1979, together with accrued interest amounting to almost £1 million, it looked as if he would be left to foot the bill. Fortunately, a settlement was reached in April 1980 under which the bank appointed a receiver to dispose of the South County on its own behalf. The property was sold three months later for £1.45 million and it gained a new lease of life as Parkes Hotel, trendy watering-hole for the southside set.

The settlement released Stephenson from his personal guarantee to the bank and Cologne Investments was allowed to keep its other main asset – a group of derelict buildings on George's Quay, including the old Silver Swan pub, whose licence ended up in Artane's ill-fated Stardust Club. Through Cologne, which he now personally controlled, Stephenson got planning permission in November 1980 for a five-storey office block – designed, inevitably, by his own architectural practice – but nothing was done to implement this scheme and the site was still lying derelict five years later.

Stephenson also surfaced as a director of Beryl Investments, which had been set up in August 1972 – the same month as the Grand Canal Syndicate. Again, its original directors were Terry Sudway and Imelda Malone, and the backers were shrouded in mystery. Early in 1975, all ninety-eight of the company's shares were allocated to Mars Nominees, the vehicle used by Guinness and Mahon to conceal the identity of sensitive clients. By 1978, Stephenson had revealed himself as a director and it was also disclosed that he owned one-third of the shares. The remainder still lurked under the umbrella of Mars Nominees, but the fact that solicitor Jim Cawley had joined Stephenson on the 'board' was itself a

tantalising clue to the identity of at least one major shareholder. Cawley was a close associate and business partner of Tony O'Reilly, the international capitalist, president of Heinz Corporation and chairman of Independent Newspapers, Fitzwilton Holdings and Atlantic Resources. And what Beryl was involved in was the speculative 'assembly' of a rather disjointed three-acre site at Bride Street and Golden Lane which, coincidentally, included the ruined remains of Dockrell's once-extensive warehouses – and Dockrell's was part of O'Reilly's Fitzwilton group. The site, much of it a derelict car park, was sold by tender in March 1980 to Dodder Properties. And after commissioning an archaeological investigation – the first time a private developer had ever done so – Dodder built the most curious little office block in Dublin. Only two-storeys high and looking for all the world like a small terrace of town-houses, it stands on Bride Street – just opposite the five-storey bulk of Iveagh flats. Normally, the arrangement would be the other way round – office blocks towering over tiny houses – but the fact that this didn't happen in Bride Street merely illustrates the marginality of the area as an office location. Indeed, short of a massive government grant, nothing would have induced Dodder Properties to build five-storey offices there. And so, the street will be left as a lop-sided memorial to the role of market forces in shaping the city.

Twelve

'Patrick Gallagher is not to be blamed for the destruction of Molesworth Street. He misled the press, he resorted to bully-boy tactics at the midnight hour, he has destroyed yet another remnant of the city's architectural heritage – but why blame him? He is a speculative builder and behaves like one.'

Patrick Gallagher was in love with success. He had all the trappings – a string of racehorses, a stud farm, friends in high places and that most conspicuous of symbols, a chauffeur-driven Rolls Royce. Though still in his twenties, he was surrounded by an eager host of architects, bankers, accountants, lawyers and auctioneers. For he was King Midas, a millionaire several times over, and they were his courtiers. Everything he said, no matter how banal, was listened to attentively. On one occasion, he told a stuffy bank board meeting that 'the three most exciting things in life are sex for the second time (you never get it right the first time), your first winner at Royal Ascot and a flight on Concorde'. The old stuffy bankers gurgled happily at this example of the great man's wit and wisdom.

Young Patrick was heir to the fortune amassed by his father, Matt Gallagher, who had died suddenly and prematurely in January 1974. However, as a result of the timely transfer of assets to several trust funds, his estate was valued at 'nil' and the Revenue Commissioners received not a single penny in

duty. Patrick had been groomed to step into his father's shoes. He was a twelve-year-old schoolboy when he first became a company director and, as time went on, he played an increasingly active role in the family business. Thus, when his father died, it was only natural that he would assume control of what, even then, was a sprawling property empire. The Gallagher Group was the main component. But there was also a fringe bank, Merchant Banking Ltd, and a complex maze of associated 'firms' – all of which were subsidiaries of Bering Estates, a holding company with its 'headquarters' at a post office box number in the Cayman Islands.

Matt Gallagher had left his son several other legacies. The most notable was the unfinished 'Gallagher Gallery' in Ely Place which, in a grand gesture befitting a Medici prince, Matt had agreed to build for the Royal Hibernian Academy. This unprecedented offer from a property developer had been accepted with gratitude by the RHA, and work started on the new gallery in 1972. The academy's old headquarters, an eccentric Victorian house which had once been the home of Oliver St John Gogarty, was demolished and it was confidently expected that the bulky modern building would be ready for its first exhibition in mid-1975. However, it transpired that Gallagher had made no provision in his will for any funds to complete the scheme and, within months of his death, construction work came to a standstill. For years, the great concrete hulk lay there, used only as a convenient storage yard for Gallagher building projects around the city centre. Instead of being Matt's memorial, it became an ugly reminder of promises unfulfilled.

Patrick Gallagher's most controversial project was also a legacy of his father. Since 1970, Merchant Banking, in association with the Church of Ireland Representative Body, had been contemplating the demolition of two of the city's earliest and most distinguished Victorian buildings – St Ann's School and Molesworth Hall. The school, designed by Deane and Woodward and built in 1857, had what Frederick O'Dwyer has described as a 'polychromatic facade, with alternative bands of calp and granite, interspersed with red brick and Portland stone'. The hall, built ten years later, was also polychromatic, but in brick rather than stone, and it had the

added distinction of being steeped in theatrical history. For Molesworth Hall was the forerunner of the Abbey and it was here, under the guidance of Yeats and Lady Gregory, that the first performance of Synge's *Riders to the Sea* had been staged.

But these associations, still less the undoubted merit of the two buildings, did not impress Desmond FitzGerald, who bombarded the Corporation with plans for a ghastly office block on the site. The planners tried to persuade him to retain the original facades in his new development, but they were on very weak ground because neither building had been listed for preservation. The conservation groups were so preoccupied with the defence of Georgian streets and squares that they had overlooked Dublin's wealth of Victorian architecture. As a result, distinguished buildings such as the pair in Molesworth Street were left without any protection and, inevitably, they became easy targets for pin-striped vandals. In this case, however, the Church of Ireland authorities were equally culpable. They refused to accept any responsibility for St Ann's School and Molesworth Hall; indeed, they seemed to regard all attempts by Victorian enthusiasts to save the buildings as dangerously subversive. Intent on making a huge speculative gain, the Church sold out to Matt Gallagher in return for a new community centre, stuck in behind his office block, and a cash settlement exceeding £300,000.

Desmond FitzGerald had been Gallagher's architect since the Mountjoy Square debacle in the mid-1960s. He was no longer head of the school of architecture at UCD; he gave up that post in June 1969 following a ferocious controversy during which it appeared that the school was in danger of losing its recognition from the Royal Institute of British Architects. For the students, this was a vital matter. Convinced that their course had 'fallen far below acceptable standards', they staged a 'sit-in' at the school in November 1968 and became the first group of students in the Republic to take such militant action. UCD's Governing Body responded by setting up an immediate inquiry into the way in which the school was being run and, while the findings were never published, it is known that they were not favourable to FitzGerald. He agreed to relinquish his post as head of the school and a

new 'director' was appointed three months later. But what were the college authorities to do with FitzGerald? As a statutory professor, he couldn't be dismissed, so they had to create a sinecure for him. Thus, in June 1970, applications were invited for a new 'chair of architecture and town planning', though the newspaper advertisement stated clearly that FitzGerald himself would be 'a candidate for the post'. A month later, he was duly appointed to the imposing chair, which carried with it limited teaching duties and no administrative functions, as the college itself admitted at the time.

As a classicist, Desmond FitzGerald would have had little sympathy for the Gothic-style architecture of Deane and Woodward. Their buildings in Molesworth Street, according to him, were just 'decrepit business premises', and he engaged in a war of attrition to ensure that his clients got permission to pull them down. Altogether, over a period of eight years, there were eleven planning applications, several appeals and two oral hearings, at which conservationists argued in vain for the retention of the buildings. FitzGerald, as *Hibernia* noted, had built his reputation on 'wearing down the opposition', and conservationists had come up against him time after time. His drawings were characterised by a vagueness which made them almost incomprehensible to lay people and even to fellow-architects. In the Molesworth Street case, the Dublin Civic Group complained that it was 'extremely difficult to evaluate the design of the proposed development and, in particular, its relationship to St Ann's Church . . . in the absence of adequate information'.

However, it was Jimmy Tully who sealed the fate of Molesworth Street. In May 1974, he granted full planning permission for the Merchant Banking/Church of Ireland scheme and, with this hurdle cleared, Patrick Gallagher bought up the few remaining Georgian properties between St Ann's School and the corner of Dawson Street. Three years later, he secured approval – again on appeal – to extend FitzGerald's scheme over the whole site. By late March 1978, Gallagher was ready to go and, under cover of an Easter bank holiday weekend, he moved in the demolition crew. A few days later, as Molesworth Hall came tumbling down, An Taisce and the civic group held a lunch-time protest meeting on the street

outside to draw attention to what Kevin B. Nowlan called 'this savagery you see before you today'. But even as Maurice Craig was warning that Dublin would be 'grievously impoverished' by the loss of these buildings, the demolition workers continued to pull them down piece by piece. 'We have already knocked down most of our Georgian buildings and now we are starting on the Victorian ones', said Alderman Kevin Byrne. 'What the hell are we going to have left?'

As usual, it fell to a small group of architecture students to make a final, desperate stand against the toll of destruction. On the night of 3 April, they occupied St Ann's School and hung out banners demanding that the demolition be stopped. The next morning, Patrick Gallagher arrived in his Rolls Royce, acceded to their demand and then called a press conference to announce that he would lay off three hundred workers on his sites around the city centre. He was 'a bit fed up' with protests, and he advised the students to 'go back to school, qualify, get jobs and be in a position to plan the city of the future'. But his dire threat of lay-offs had the desired effect. Workers on the Molesworth Street site began marching up and down outside the occupied building, with placards saying 'Save Our Jobs', and they were joined soon afterwards by colleagues arriving in cars from the other Gallagher sites. In *Hibernia*, Mairin de Burca commented, 'Some day, not soon, but some day, the workers will refuse to be used as pawns for the Gallaghers of this world and will see many of the points made by the preservationists as being valid and important, first and foremost to the working class who form the great majority of our population. Then, the Gallaghers and their ilk will be snookered.'

Three days later, Gallagher got a High Court injunction against the students and, at one o'clock the following morning, as they held a meeting to decide what to do next, the demolition workers attached a hawser line to one of the high chimney stacks and pulled it crashing through the roof. Then, while the helpless students were held back by 'security men' with half-starved Alsatian dogs, Gallagher's minions moved to complete their work of destruction. According to an eyewitness report in the *Irish Times*, 'the demolition workers swarmed over the old building and looped their hawser line

around the massive end wall and onto a big tracked digger. The digger backed off, its great jointed neck reared back, it lifted off its tracks, but the building would not give . . . A large group of gardai arrived, and late-night diners watched the machine wearing itself out trying to bring the wall down, but it would not budge'. Eventually, the building – which Gallagher's representatives had told the High Court was in a 'dangerous condition' – had to be chipped away bit by bit before the site could be cleared for development.

The seething rage among conservationists was echoed by an article in *Hibernia* a few days later. 'Patrick Gallagher is not to be blamed for the destruction of Molesworth Street. He misled the press, he resorted to bully-boy tactics at the midnight hour, he has destroyed yet another remnant of the city's architectural heritage – but why blame him? He is a speculative builder and behaves like one', Deirdre Younge wrote. 'But what of the Royal Institute of Architects – the governing body of the profession in Ireland, whose objects include "the promotion of high standards of professional conduct and practice, the advancement of architecture and the associated arts and sciences"? If the institute has an opinion on the destruction of our architectural heritage, it has been well kept from the public. And whether it approves or disapproves of one of its members, and a former professor of architecture at UCD, planning and executing the destruction of exceptional Victorian buildings, nobody has even bothered to ask.'

But Patrick Gallagher had got his way and, in place of the varied ensemble of Victorian and Georgian buildings, Desmond FitzGerald designed a typically monolithic 'modern' office block. It consists of 'a reinforced concrete frame with infilling walls and glazed units' (his own description), capped by the inevitable out-sized 'penthouse'; its elephantine bulk is an insult to the buildings it replaced and is grotesquely unsympathetic to the character of the area. Yet, even before it was completed in 1980, Gallagher managed to sign up such 'blue chip' tenants as the EEC Commission and StanChart Bank, and then he grossed more than £2 million by selling the block to the Aer Lingus Pension Fund. Not long afterwards, this end of Molesworth Street was turned into a forbidding canyon

when Sun Alliance complemented Gallagher's contribution by building another five-storey office block on the opposite side. Here, too, the loss to the city's fabric was incalculable – but nevertheless Jimmy Tully sanctioned the scheme in February 1977. What Frederick O'Dwyer has described as 'a unique collection of architectural styles ranging from mid-eighteenth century to 1930s neo-Georgian' was sacrificed to make way for the modern building designed by Tyndall Hogan Hurley. The only survivors were three rococo ceilings, one of which was re-erected in the glass-walled entrance lobby – perhaps the only interesting feature of an otherwise dull and dreary development.

Molesworth Street was not the first assault on Deane and Woodward's architectural legacy, nor would it be the last. Their premier masterpiece, the Kildare Street Club, was under serious threat as far back as 1967 when Phoenix Assurance sought permission to replace half of it with a modern office block. And though the company itself was British and its architects were London-based, the notice they published in the newspapers was unaccountably *as gaeilge*. When the plot was exposed in the architectural press, Phoenix found itself the target of odium and ridicule. *Build* asked whether the company intended to transact all of its other business through Irish, or was this merely a stratagem to conceal 'a classical piece of urban butchery'? A Phoenix spokesman didn't help when he tried to 'clarify' the situation. 'The entire building is not coming down. We do not own it. Only two-thirds will come down', he said. Meanwhile, Maurice Craig added his authoritative voice to the growing chorus of protest, in a letter from London where he was working at the time. 'The Kildare Street Club is one of Dublin's most distinguished nineteenth-century buildings, faultlessly handled in scale and texture and enriched with the highly-characteristic craftsmanship of Charles Harrison and the O'Shea brothers', he wrote. 'If we really care for artistic and architectural quality, we can prove it only by ensuring that the Kildare Street Club remains to give delight to future generations as it has done for the last one hundred years.'

In June 1967, the Corporation refused approval for the demolition scheme, not least because the building was desig-

nated for preservation, and Phoenix did not pursue the matter any further. It seemed as if the Kildare Street Club had been saved. Three years later, however, Phoenix sold its portion of the premises to Rampart Holdings, the Irish subsidiary of a Manchester-based property and construction group called Norwest Holst. High-flying Norwest also had interests in France, Italy and Portugal, and its Dublin operation was run from No. 12 Merrion Square, one of the finest Georgian houses on the south side. Indeed, it was here that Rampart Holdings pulled off something of a coup by getting a 'default permission' for an office block in the back garden – because the Corporation, through some oversight, had failed to make a decision on the application within the two-month statutory period. The result was Palmerston House, a five-storey block with recessed tinted windows in pre-cast wall units of 'reconstituted stone', which was officially opened in March 1974 by the then Minster for Defence, Paddy Donegan. Why him? Well, it just so happened that the blustery Fine Gael Minister, through his wife Olivia, had a minority stake in a £1 million 'town centre' development Rampart was planning for Drogheda, Co. Louth. (This scheme was abandoned, however, because of an acute cash crisis at Norwest, of which more anon.)

Rampart's architects for most of its Irish developments – including Palmerston House and the unlovely Rathmines Town Hall Shopping Centre – were David Keane and Partners. Curiously, however, this firm did not handle their client's devastating plans for the Kildare Street Club. That delicate task was entrusted to Colm Dixon and Associates, and the planning application was processed at arm's length by Rampart's solicitors, T. G. McVeagh and Co. In March 1971, under the guise of carrying out interior 'alterations', they sought permission to tear the guts out of the building. And despite the fact that it was listed for preservation, this ruthless act of vandalism was treated as an exempted development, requiring approval only under the building by-laws. Rampart was exploiting a major loop-hole in the Planning Act. Interiors of listed buildings were *not* protected, though the terrible fate of the Kildare Street Club did at least foreshadow a change in the law in 1976. At the time, however,

conservationists could do nothing to prevent the destruction. Because it was 'exempt', there was no right of appeal against the Corporation's abrupt decision, in April 1971, to allow the scheme to go ahead.

And so, the front portion of the old club premises was converted into a four-storey office block, yielding 15,500 square feet of lettable space for Rampart Holdings. In the process, Dublin lost what was probably the most original entrance hall in the city. A dramatic vertical space, this pinnacle of Victorian craftsmanship had everything – vaulted arcades, superb flying buttresses and a grand staircase, with pierced stone ballustrades as well as a stone fireplace and countless columns 'elaborately carved with clusters of interlacing birds, dogs, weasels, snakes, foxes, butterflies, snails and toads, as if the illiterate Kerry craftsmen were quietly satirising the impressiveness of their surroundings', as Jeremy Williams noted in *Hibernia*. All of this, and much more besides, was hacked down in a cretinous orgy of destruction. For, as Williams pointed out, all of the rooms on the two main floors were high enough to take light mezzanines, which would have doubled the amount of office space in the building without sacrificing the splendid entrance hall. But neither Rampart nor its architects were receptive to such modest proposals, and the 'work' was completed according to plan by early 1973. Most surprisingly, the French Embassy agreed to lease the butchered building as a Dublin headquarters for the Alliance Francaise. André Malraux would have been horrified.

But pin-striped vandalism pays handsome dividends, as Rampart proved when it sold the finished product to New Ireland Assurance at a profit of £100,000. Indeed, the developers were so encouraged by this success that they agreed to buy the remainder of the Kildare Street Club for £257,000 in February 1974 – with the intention of giving it the same treatment. A deposit of £24,000 was paid, contracts were exchanged between the club and Rampart's parent, Norwest Holst, and New Ireland offered to put up the funds for the proposed 'development'. Not long afterwards, the whole deal began to fall apart. Because of the big property slump in mid 1974, New Ireland felt unable to proceed with the funding operation, while Norwest itself was caught in a

cleft stick between falling site values and rising interest rates. Under pressure from its bankers, the company had to undertake an urgent review of its commitments in Ireland, and two leading directors – D. B. Le Mare and John Lilley – flew over to investigate the Irish operation. They were 'horrified' by what they found, as the report of a British Department of Trade inquiry into Norwest's affairs would reveal later.

This remarkable report, with all the ingredients of a Harold Robbins' novel, provided a unique insight into the jungle of Dublin's property world. In particular, it focused on a mysterious payment of £100,000 made by Rampart Holdings to a company registered in the Cayman Islands, allegedly in return for services rendered to enable Norwest to extricate itself from its 'Irish problems'. The cheque was paid in December 1974 to Guinness and Mahon, who credited the money to British Isles Investments, an off-shore company managed by the bank's subsidiary in Georgetown, Grand Cayman. And the man who played a central role in this transaction, according to one account, was solicitor Liam McGonagle. In evidence to the DoT inspectors, John Lilley described McGonagle as 'a fixer of some renown' and said, 'He is not a solicitor in the ordinary sense of the word; he is a big developer. The previous contracts we had with him involved equity. He always took a share. The legal practice is, I think, just a convenience. He happens to be a solicitor as his main activity, which includes investigating into properties and all sorts of things. He is an entrepreneur.'

Lilley was very friendly with McGonagle and had been on holidays with him many times. Before becoming a director of Norwest, Lilley – a one-time car salesman and estate agent – was the major shareholder in a property company called Stonegate Securities, which was also active in Dublin during the early 1970s. This had brought him into contact with McGonagle and John Finnegan of Finnegan Menton. They had both taken a share in Stonegate's first Irish venture, the Crumlin Shopping Centre. 'We ran into some difficulty there with planning permission, which was a very serious matter', Lilley told the DoT inspectors. 'We saw Mr McGonagle about that. What he arranged was for us to see the Prime Minister of Ireland, Mr Lynch, the next morning. We told him of our difficulties, which were considerable, and we had planning permission the following afternoon. That is the sort of power Mr McGonagle has got. He is a real fixer, Mr McGonagle, there is no doubt about that.'

Jack Lynch was not interviewed by the inspectors and, when their report was published, he was very concerned about this allegation. He said he knew McGonagle slightly, through his involvement in Fianna Fáil, but he had no recollection about anyone coming to see him about property in Crumlin. If anyone mentioned a planning matter to him while he was Taoiseach, he told *Business and Finance*, he always advised them to use the normal channels. It is interesting to note, however, that Stonegate *did* get planning permission, on appeal, for the Crumlin scheme in November 1972. At the time, Bobby Molloy was Minister for Local Government.

When Norwest got into difficulties over the Kildare Street Club contract, Lilley brought in McGonagle and Finnegan to advise on a settlement. John Broadhead of Lisney's was acting for the club, and a deal was eventually struck when Norwest agreed to forfeit its £24,000 deposit and pay an additional penalty of £26,000. 'An amazing thing happened, and this is how the settlement really came about, and I think it has all the signs of McGonagle. The government popped out of nowhere and bought it (the club's former premises), and what-do-you-call-him – Broadhead – negotiated for them', Lilley said. 'It was the purchase by the government that really got us off the hook.'

Lilley maintained that McGonagle had 'a great influence' on the deal, though the DoT inspectors were so stunned by his revelations that they thought he was 'making this up as you go along'. As for the Cayman-registered British Isles Investments, Lilley said it was 'some kind of company that Mr McGonagle uses to handle fees and put deals through in probably the most tax-effective way'. Some or all of the mysterious £100,000 had, according to him, been used to 'ease the passage of this contract' in line with McGonagle's promise to 'bring it all to a happy conclusion for everybody'. The request for the payment was made in a letter from British Isles Investments which, Lilley told the inspectors, had been signed in his presence by McGonagle, using the pseudonym

'Raymond Smyth'. The £100,000 'fee', the letter said, was to cover 'all our expenses and disbursements' in connection with 'our efforts and the efforts of the professional team engaged by us in Ireland' to extricate Norwest from its onerous property commitments 'on highly favourable terms'. However, according to the DoT report, 'no one seemed to know precisely what those services were, when they were rendered or, really, by whom, or why there was such a crying urgency about payment in December 1974'.

The inspectors said they found it 'quite incredible that the payment of £100,000 should be surrounded by such a web of mystery and intrigue if it was, in fact, a proper payment made to a third party for services rendered to Norwest'. They poured ice-cold water on Lilley's account, noting that there was 'not a scrap of contemporaneous documentation' to support his version of the deal with British Isles Investments. 'We found Mr Lilley's evidence of the making of the agreement and its terms so improbable as to lead us to conclude that it was an invention from beginning to end', they declared. The Cayman Islands story, their report said, was 'an elaborate deception to conceal the true purpose and destination of the payment'. The balance of probability, according to the inspectors, was that the £100,000 was 'at least in part, payment for Stonegate's services in Ireland' and it had been agreed upon in July 1974 when Lilley joined the Norwest board. In general, they took the view that the whole business proceeded from Stonegate's efforts to take over Norwest a year earlier. And as to the conduct of Lilley and his partner, Raymond Slater, in the prosecution of Stonegate's bid for the group, the inspectors said it was 'deplorable', showing 'scant regard for the responsibilities of directors of public companies and the interests of stockholders'.

Nevertheless, Lilley's explanation of the £100,000 payment remains the only one given to the DoT inspectors. McGonagle, who might have been able to shed light on the affair, steadfastedly held his tongue. During a visit to Dublin, the inspectors tried on five separate occasions to interview him, but he declined to meet them. After their report was published McGonagle told *Business and Finance* that he had only heard about it and hadn't actually read it. 'What I have heard bears little relationship to the facts', he declared. Des Traynor, the chief executive of Guinness and Mahon, was prepared to assist them – but only to the extent that it wouldn't 'compromise' the interests of British Isles Investments. And John Broadhead, in his evidence, added another twist to the mystery by saying that he hadn't come across McGonagle or any 'team' in the course of his negotiations. One thing is certain, however. The Office of Public Works *did* agree to purchase the remaining portion of the Kildare Street Club in late 1974 for £300,000, though it wasn't until January 1982 – over seven years later – that work finally started on refurbishing the premises as an annexe for the National Library.

Patrick Gallagher, by contrast, was a young man in a hurry. Fresh from the destruction of Molesworth Hall, he pulled down four Georgian buildings in Clare Street – one of which had just recently been renovated by Merchant Banking – to make way for an office block, designed by Desmond FitzGerald in what might loosely be called a 'Georgian' style. (It was let, on completion in 1980, to the Department of Energy.) Then, the chain-smoking developer and his architect turned their attention to Harcourt Terrace where, since 1974, they had been trying to get planning permission for an office development in the back gardens of two houses at the canal end. Nos. 10 and 11, dating from the 1830s, were an integral part of the only Regency terrace in Ireland built as a unified composition. The entire terrace, not surprisingly, was listed for protection and it was zoned for residential and 'compatible office use' in the Corporation's development plan. But this enclave of tranquility, where Micheal MacLiammoir and Hilton Edwards had made their home, was almost bound to become a target for predators. Office developments were springing up all around Harcourt Terrace and one five-storey block – McConnell House – had been built right behind it, on Charlemont Place. This truly dreadful building, aptly described by *Plan* as a 'leggy piece of non-architecture . . . an office block in its most basic and economic form', was designed in the mid-1960s by McDonnell and Dixon for the same trio of speculators who left us with the Guardian Royal Exchange block on St Stephen's Green. The developers of McConnell House were Charlemont Estates, a company con-

trolled by millionaire businessman Patrick McGrath, his brothers, Joseph and Seamus, and two Corkmen, Barrie and Cornelius Collins. They were also involved in the development of another McDonnell and Dixon office block, beside Cathal Brugha Barracks in Rathmines, which was let to the Central Statistics Office. Both blocks were sold off later to Irish Pension Fund Unit Trust.

Among the other developers involved in pork-barrel projects in and around Harcourt Terrace was John Ronan, a Tipperary pig farmer whose home near Carrick-on-Suir was called Coolnamuck House. In 1978, Ronan bought two decent houses at the corner of Adelaide Road and Harcourt Terrace with the benefit of planning permission for a four-storey 'replica' office block. After demolishing the two houses, what he built on the site was a *five-storey* block – with the fifth floor lurking behind an overbearing 'Mansard' roof. The Corporation conceded that the development was 'not consistent with the planning permission', but did nothing about it. Emboldened by the success of this venture, Ronan and his trainee accountant son, also named John, snapped up two List I Georgian houses in unspoiled Upper Mount Street and promptly lodged plans to replace them with a fake-Georgian office block. Fortunately for the future of this critically important street, the scheme was turned down and the two houses were later converted into offices. After his father's death in 1983, young John Ronan joined forces with brother-in-law Noel O'Callaghan and together they built a violently vulgar office and shop development at Ranelagh Triangle, rudely upstaging McCambridge's renowned delicatessen right next door.

Meanwhile, Patrick Gallagher had been quick to spot the 'development potential' of Nos. 10 and 11 Harcourt Terrace, since their back gardens were directly overlooking the McConnell House office block, and Merchant Banking purchased the two properties early in 1974, reputedly for less than £50,000. However, before any planning applications were lodged, Gallagher was informed *in writing* by the Corporation that 'there is not any scope for development in the rear gardens of these houses'. This proved to be no deterrent either to him or his architect, whose care for listed buildings

was not unlimited: when the Corporation proposed listing his Georgian property in Merrion Square, Desmond FitzGerald had objected in the most strenuous terms. So when it came to Harcourt Terrace, the professor was quite prepared to employ his standard tactics of wearing down the opposition by submitting a plethora of plans, all of which were rejected by the Corporation. These schemes, each one subtly different from the other, generally involved the demolition and 'reinstatement' of the two houses and the erection of a substantial office block in the rear gardens.

Every single one of FitzGerald's plans was vigorously resisted by local residents, conservation groups, city councillors and Dáil deputies – including his younger brother Garret. But few had the stamina or the zeal of Rico Ross and his wife Eileen, who lived next door to the Gallagher site. For them, it became a crusade, a day-to-day obsession. Rico, a fiery and garrulous Italian-American, used to dress up as a tramp and trudge down to Merrion Square, where he would go through the dustbins outside FitzGerald's office in search of 'incriminating' letters and other discarded tit-bits. Mostly, he found nothing of any interest. Dustbins rarely do yield startling secrets, though Rico lived in hope. Along with his wife, he maintained a constant vigil over the two threatened houses, which had been left wide open to vandalism, and it was at their insistence that the Corporation had them properly secured. Late in 1976, however, both houses might have been destroyed by a massive explosion. No. 10 was found to be filled with gas from a broken pipe inside the house, and the Gas Company had to dig up the front lawn to disconnect the supply. The back gardens had already been attacked by Gallagher's bulldozers, with the loss of several mature trees, and they were now overgrown with weeds. For a time, some unknown entrepreneur cultivated a small crop of marijuana amid all the dereliction – and just a stone's throw from Harcourt Terrace garda station.

Meanwhile, Merchant Banking engaged the services of Eamonn Walsh SC to prosecute its case for a planning permission. Walsh, a sharp barrister, was the leading expert on planning law and he made a fortune by representing developers in countless court cases and public inquiries over the years.

The Harcourt Terrace scheme, he argued at an oral hearing in October 1976, was a 'worthwhile' development and his clients had 'gone to great lengths' to comply with the Corporation's requirements. This line of argument certainly yielded results, judging by Bord Pleanala's peculiar decision on the appeal. In June 1977, just three months after taking office, the board decided to refuse permission but in a highly controversial addendum it proceeded to offer free advice on how the office block might be redesigned to win approval at a later stage. In doing so, the appeals board was accused of going far beyond its brief, even of usurping the functions of the City Council. However, for Desmond FitzGerald, this chink in the armour was just what he needed and, within a matter of weeks, he had submitted a revised set of plans – drawn up to comply with 'the requirements of the planning board'.

Yet again, the Corporation refused permission, leaving the way open for FitzGerald to lodge a fresh appeal to Bord Pleanala. At the second oral hearing, in May 1978, he described the houses in Harcourt Terrace as 'the most pretentious houses in Dublin' and justified the absence of open space around his office block by saying that 'only the rich can afford green horizons'. Characteristically, his drawings were so vague that even he found them puzzling. He couldn't decide whether there were six or seven flats in the 'reinstated' houses, though he settled for six on the basis that 'no one should be asked to live in a basement in this day and age'. It also turned out that the few car parking spaces he had provided were imaginary. There was no rear elevation of the office block, no plans for the basement and no longitudinal section. Indeed the inspector presiding at the inquiry commented that if he had been the Corporation, he would at least have requested further details. There was also an air of mystery about who really owned the Harcourt Terrace property, with Eamonn Walsh confirming suspicions that it had been sold – but only to 'another company within the Gallagher Group'. All things considered, Bord Pleanala rejected the appeal, FitzGerald stepped out of the picture and local residents felt they had the battle won.

However, as *Hibernia* noted, 'the schemes of big business

are inexhaustible' and, in the spring of 1979, a company called Ireland Holdings submitted new plans for Harcourt Terrace, drawn up by a group of recently-qualified designers trading under the banner of Grafton Architects. This scheme was also rejected by the Corporation and, when it went to appeal, serious questions were raised about the validity of the application. It transpired that Ireland Holdings was a phantom company, which had gone into voluntary liquidation in 1973. But when this was pointed out at the oral hearing in November 1979, the inspector ruled that it was not relevant. 'Bord Pleanala refuses to discuss the matter of phantom companies', said *Hibernia*. 'They have, it seems, no set policy on non-existent companies that take up public time and money making planning applications. They are not so vague, however, when it comes to third-party "vexatious" objections from private citizens . . . Objectors to particular plans must stand up and be counted and identified; so why not speculators?'

And so, on 4 September 1980, the appeals board granted full planning permission for a major development at Harcourt Terrace to a company which didn't exist at the time when the application was made or the appeal lodged. Two days earlier, in an act of brazen cynicism, a new company called Ireland Holdings was registered – presumably to 'regularise' the situation and to take conveyance of the board's favourable decision. The men behind this move were Tony O'Donoghue, an engineer and director of Tower Homes, the vehicle of Patrick Gallagher's uncle Hubert, and Hugh Owens, of chartered accountants Owens Murray and Co, whose partner, Sean Murray, acted as chief 'moneybags' for Fine Gael. However, because of the shadow over 'Ireland Holdings', Owens and O'Donoghue relaunched themselves as Hightone Holdings and then proceeded to gut the interiors of the two Harcourt Terrace houses, reducing them to a roofless shell. Rico Ross got an injunction to halt the demolition and then launched a High Court action challenging the validity of Bord Pleanala's decision. However, by the time he won judgment more than a year later, Hightone had already nullified its effect by wrapping up a fresh, untainted planning permission. Ross contested that, too, but lost and when he couldn't afford to pay

the legal costs, the developers moved to have him declared a bankrupt. At the time of writing, the company still seemed intent on securing such a declaration against him. Meanwhile, after numerous other planning applications and appeals, Hightone converted what was left of the two houses into seven luxury flats, all of which fetched staggeringly high prices when they were sold in the summer of 1983. Yet after all the years of bitter controversy, there was still no sign of the proposed back-garden office block. The slump in the market place had put a damper on that project, at least for the time being.

Watching the whole saga unfold with more than passing interest were the Legion of Mary, a Catholic voluntary group not immediately identifiable with speculation. Through its property arm, De Montfort Trust, the Legion owned the large Regency building which formed the centrepiece of Harcourt Terrace. The building, with its fine Ionic portico, was crudely extended by the Legion in the early 1960s to house the Overseas Students Club. In 1976, however, the club's lease was abruptly terminated when it became clear that the Legion intended to sell the property for redevelopment. After being vacant for almost a year, the building was taken over by Women's Aid, who transformed it into a makeshift refuge for battered wives. But they, too, were eventually forced out in April 1982. The imposing premises was then left to rot, its ground-floor windows bricked up with cement blocks, while the Legion dallied with plans for an office and residential 'development' on the site. There were several break-ins, during which lead was stripped from the roof, but the Legion steadfastly refused to prosecute the culprits, even when they were caught in the act. Coincidentally, the chairman of De Montfort Trust, Enda Donleavy, was an assistant principal officer in charge of OPW's national monuments branch. Clearly, his concern for architectural artifacts was confined to office hours.

A planning saga that had been unfolding for even longer than the Harcourt Terrace affair was coming to a head around the same time in the pleasant suburbs of South Co. Dublin. As far back as 1971, the Frescati and Blackrock Protection Society had been set up to resist plans for the demolition of

Frescati House, the eighteenth-century residence of Lord Edward FitzGerald. A marine villa, just outside Blackrock, Frescati had beautifully proportioned rooms with painted ceilings, magnificent fireplaces and elegant plasterwork, mainly in the Adam style. Ironically, in view of his involvement in the Harcourt Terrace and Molesworth Street controversies, no less a person than Desmond FitzGerald himself served as chairman of the society. According to him, Frescati was unique in South Co. Dublin, with no building to match it between Leinster House and Powerscourt. Lord Edward had loved the place, constantly extolling its virtues in his letters. In 1794 he wrote, 'I have left off gardening. I hated that all my work should go to that vile Westmoreland, who is determined on taking Frescati. Imagine my flowers for aides and such followers of a Lord Lieutenant!'

In 1969, the house and almost seven acres of wooded grounds fell into the hands of Frescati Estates Ltd, a company controlled by Dublin solicitor Walter Maguire and his partner, Walter Beatty, who later became president of the Incorporated Law Society. They had extensive property interests and often acted as front men for British speculators. In the case of Frescati, their clients were a London-based outfit called Acorn Trust, though ownership of the property was transferred soon afterwards to Roches Stores. Plans were announced in 1971 for a major shopping development on the site and, when it became clear that this would involve demolishing Frescati House, there was an immediate outcry. Over four hundred people crowded into Blackrock Town Hall for a protest meeting addressed by leading conservationists, among them the ever-emotional Micheal MacLiammoir. 'We should struggle and protest, even if we go down under the wave of vulgar bullying. If we are careful, vociferous and violent enough, Frescati will be saved. Man does not live by bread alone, nor does a nation live by supermarkets alone', he declared.

But the ground for the Roches Stores scheme had been diligently laid by Maguire and Beatty – aided and abetted by the blind man's bungling of Dun Laoghaire Corporation. For it was a series of incredible decisions by the Corporation that virtually guaranteed the destruction of Frescati House. And

each and every one of these decisions was endorsed by the borough councillors, some of whom would later climb on the 'Save Frescati' bandwagon. Firstly, despite representations from An Taisce, Lord Edward's home was *not* listed for preservation in the borough development plan. Secondly, the Corporation left Frescati exposed by routing a major by-pass road through the grounds – without, of course, rebuilding the estate walls. Thirdly, the house itself and the surrounding land was zoned for commercial development, as if to ensure that it would become a target for speculators. Finally, on 15 September 1970, the Corporation granted permission under the Housing Act for the demolition of Frescati House – subject only to the developers securing planning approval for whatever they had in mind.

It was only after the Corporation had notched up this amazing catalogue of errors that the campaign to save Frescati got under way. And when it did, the borough councillors and planners tried to pass themselves off as defenders of Blackrock's heritage by refusing permission for the Roches Stores scheme. Indeed, the scheme was turned down on four separate occasions, leading to fears that the developers would attempt to demolish Frescati illegally, thus rendering the whole debate irrelevant. One Saturday morning in January 1972, ever-vigilant conservationists spotted several 'workmen' in the house and immediately alerted the Corporation. A housing officer was sent to investigate and, moments after he arrived, a heavy lorry laden with timber and masonry came around from the rear of the building. Conservationists tried to stop the lorry, but it kept on moving, and the driver refused to say who he was working for. Later, after some considerable difficulty, the Corporation official managed to gain access to the house. Inside, he found William Maguire, architect for the Roches Stores development and immediate past president of the RIAI. Maguire claimed that they were 'only lifting the floorboards and joists', but it was made clear to him that they had no permission to carry out any works on the house. Then, after the housing officer had failed to extract a satisfactory assurance that demolition was not imminent, the Corporation got an injunction at a special sitting of the High Court to restrain his clients from demolishing Frescati. At

another court hearing four days later, Eamonn Walsh SC put it all down to a 'misunderstanding' and said that the 'works' were intended merely 'to secure the building against illegal entry'. He did, however, give an undertaking on behalf of Roches Stores that Frescati would not be demolished at least until the Corporation's conditions had been met.

Walsh went on to represent the developers throughout the endless succession of court cases and oral hearings over Frescati, marshalling every possible argument in favour of its destruction. In October 1972, he contended – quite erroneously – that Lord Edward's association with the house had only been brief. Frescati, he said, was 'a pleasant house of some value' which would be 'worth preserving if that were practical'. If it was retained, however, it would be 'impossible to carry out a worthwhile economic development on the site'. This line of argument was echoed by the architect, William Maguire, who was a brother of Roches Stores' solicitor, Walter Maguire. His office, he said, had 'considered a great number of plans' designed to save Frescati, but they 'could not be reconciled with the needs of practical development' – a very curious claim, given that the house itself occupied a small fraction of the seven-acre site. For Roches Stores, Frescati was simply a nuisance and they wanted to be rid of it at the earliest possible opportunity. All they were prepared to preserve was a single stuccoed ceiling, which would be installed in some sort of 'memorial hall' adjoining their shopping centre.

Conservationists were equally determined to save Frescati and, in mid-1973, they tried a rather novel tack. Marie Walker, the energetic secretary of the Frescati Protection Society, applied for – and got – planning permission for a 'development' that would preserve the house. In doing so, she was quite openly exploiting a legal loophole which allowed speculators to apply for permission to redevelop any property without the owner's knowledge or consent. The widespread use of this underhand device had been amusingly highlighted by Dublin planning consultant Fergal McCabe in 1971 when he sought permission for 'a small cabin of clay and wattle construction, nine bean rows and a honey-bee hive' on the lake isle of Inishfree. But if Sligo County Council saw the

joke, they didn't show it. In a totally deadpan decision, the council refused permission on the grounds that the 'proposed development would injure the amenities of the island and hinder its use as a public open space'. Roches Stores were even less amused by Marie Walker's scheme for Frescati and they sought to have her planning permission quashed. After lengthy legal arguments, the case went all the way to the Supreme Court. In a landmark decision, handed down in July 1974, the court ruled that, for a planning application to be valid, it must be made by a person who has a sufficient legal interest in a property to enable him to carry out the development being proposed.

Meanwhile, Roches Stores had put the screws on Dun Laoghaire Corporation. Because Frescati was zoned commercial and the scheme they had put forward complied with this zoning, the Corporation could not unreasonably refuse permission without incurring a liability to pay compensation. Like every other developer, the company knew that compensation was the Achilles' heel of local government, so they decided to call the Corporation's bluff by lodging an astronomical claim for £1.3 million. The sum involved was, of course, wildly unrealistic, but the very thought of it soon had Corporation officials scurrying for cover. Realising that they hadn't a leg to stand on, the borough manager, Paddy Morrissey, gave an undertaking to grant 'all and any permission sought' and, by January 1974, Roches Stores had planning approval for a large department store, a six-storey office block and parking space for over seven hundred cars on the grounds of Frescati. There was one condition, however. The main part of the house was to be 'retained', though it was clear even then that the developers had written it off. Far from being 'secured against illegal entry', Frescati was left open to all and sundry, and the company didn't lift a finger to prosecute the vandals and marauders who were reducing it to rack and ruin.

From then on, the fight to save the house was very much an uphill struggle, with the combined forces of the Corporation and the developers ranged against the conservation interests. But the Frescati Protection Society was not totally beleagured. After all, they had a formidable champion in

Desmond FitzGerald, even if he did look rather strange in the raiment of the White Knight. The thrust of his argument was also unusual. Instead of delivering a highly-embroidered dissertation on the merits of the house itself, he directed his fire on the 'irrational' zoning of the site. If the by-pass road was to be effective, he said, it made no sense at all to zone Frescati for a huge commercial development – particularly a shopping centre, with all the traffic it would generate. Jimmy Tully agreed and, in one of his very few pro-conservation decisions, he overturned Dun Laoghaire Corporation's permission in July 1976. Eight months later, however, the Corporation granted approval for a revised version of the Roches Stores scheme. But after another oral hearing in 1978, Bord Pleanala again upheld the objectors' case by refusing permission – largely for the same traffic-related reasons cited by Tully. Less than a month after the board's decision, in August 1978, Roches Stores and their architects were back again with another revised scheme and this, too, was approved by the Corporation. But despite yet another appeal by conservationists – backed up, as always, by Blackrock traders – Bord Pleanala succumbed, granting permission for the development in May 1979. More amazingly, the board's decision made no reference to the need to 'retain' the central portion of the house, though this had for long been the Corporation's principal requirement. By neglecting to impose such a condition, Bord Pleanala had finally sealed the fate of Frescati.

Perhaps the board felt that Lord Edward's home was already beyond salvation. Years of relentless vandalism, encouraged by persistent neglect, had taken their toll and the once-pristine house was now practically derelict. Stripped of its wings in April 1981, the roofless central core, overgrown with ivy, became one of Dublin's least decorous sights – an unwanted remnant of the past left stranded in acres of tarmacadam. Roches Stores – a family enterprise controlled by reclusive brothers William, Stanley and Raymond Roche – built their supermarket, but they did nothing to restore what was left of Frescati. In desperation, Dun Laoghaire Corporation took a legal action against them, claiming that the 'retention' of the house was an integral part of the whole scheme, but the Corporation found that it couldn't escape

from the consequences of its own incompetence. In December 1982, the Supreme Court ruled that the fate of this historic building had been decided back in 1970 when the Corporation, wearing its hat as a housing authority, granted a demolition order. Once that was done, the judges said, the destruction of Frescati House had become 'inevitable'. The ruins were finally swept away with the autumn leaves in October 1983 and, to compensate for this loss, Roches Stores agreed to erect a 'suitably-worded' plaque on the site. It reads: '1798. Lord Edward FitzGerald, leader of the United Irishmen, born in Kildare, 18th October 1753, died in Dublin, 4th June 1798, lived in Frescati House.'

Following the demolition of Frescati and the completion of several other undesirable developments in the area, Blackrock was well on its way to becoming 'a place with no name – just super markets, super offices and low living', as Kevin B. Nowlan had warned in 1972. The delicate fabric of the township had been rent asunder to make way for a by-pass road lined with office blocks, and the pace of change was so fast and furious that it had the estate agents purring about the prospects of 'another Ballsbridge'.

Presiding over this headlong rush for redevelopment was Sean Gibbons, the most senior planning official in Dun Laoghaire Corporation. He played a very active role in the whole process, though the nature and extent of his involvement did not come to light until March 1981 when Ray Burke, then Minister for the Environment, ordered an inquiry into the affairs of the borough planning department. This followed a court case during which a resident of Dun Laoghaire recalled approaching Gibbons for advice on a planning application. To his surprise, Gibbons had said to him, 'Would you give the job to my son? He is an architect.' His son, John T. Gibbons, ran a very busy architectural practice and he had cornered the lion's share of commissions for projects in Dun Laoghaire while his father was the borough's senior planning official. Indeed, an investigation by the RTE programme 'Today Tonight' uncovered the staggering statistic that 52 per cent of all successful planning applications over a two-year period were handled by J. T. Gibbons and Associates. As a result of these irregularities, Gibbons Senior was suspended

without pay, though he was later allowed to 'retire', thereby protecting his pension rights. Less than two years later, he was elected president of Dun Laoghaire Rotary Club. The findings of the inquiry ordered by Ray Burke were never made known.

One of the many buildings designed by J. T. Gibbons and approved during his father's reign in the planning department was 'Frescati Hall', a ghastly lump of an office block on the Blackrock by-pass, opposite Roches Stores. Five storeys high and towering over the terrace of tiny houses in George's Place, it was developed by the Woods brothers, who specialised in operating at the sharper end of the market. F. X. Woods, a chemical engineer, and his brother T. J., a chartered accountant, had become involved in property speculation in the early 1970s. They started off modestly enough by building houses, usually in collaboration with Joe Tiernan, an unsuccessful Fine Gael candidate for Dublin County Council, and then moved into the big league of large-scale land dealing. Through Belgrove Estates, the Woods brothers were among the consortium of builders and speculators who waged a long, controversial and ultimately successful battle with the County Council over seven hundred acres of land in the Fortunestown area of Tallaght. In another deal, near Swords, they are reputed to have made a 300 per cent profit in just twelve months on the purchase and re-sale of land. In at least two other cases, at Drinan and Foxwood (called after F. X. himself), they bought up land in agricultural use and had it rezoned for housing development – courtesy of Jimmy Tully. Earlier, in what *Hibernia* described as a 'quick exercise in asset-stripping', they took over Leetham's, a clothing company with a large premises in Abbey Street, and over one hundred workers lost their jobs.

The Woods brothers' biggest coup came in 1980 when Bord Pleanala, in a highly controversial decision, agreed to grant planning permission for a high-density housing scheme at Hackettsland, south of Killiney. For more than ten years, this fifty-acre coastal strip had been the subject of a running battle between local residents and the previous owners, Templefinn Estates, a company controlled by Northern Ireland peer Lord Dunleath. After numerous planning applic-

ations and appeals as well as two High Court cases, all Dunleath had been able to get was permission for just over 180 houses. Early in 1980, Templefinn's interest was acquired by the Woods brothers, who immediately lodged plans to build almost four hundred houses on the land. Dun Laoghaire Corporation rejected this audacious scheme in June 1980 on the grounds that the greatly-increased density would be 'excessive', but Bord Pleanala overturned this decision less than six months later. Not long afterwards, the beneficiaries sold off the bulk of their site at a vast profit to a number of smaller builders. Following allegations of impropriety against John Conway, the board member who had handled the Hackettsland appeal, an investigation was ordered by the chairman, Judge Denis Pringle. This concluded that Conway, a one-time planning inspector with the Department of Local Government, was 'absolutely beyond reproach'. He continued to serve on the board until April 1982, when he retired to become a freelance planning consultant.

Meanwhile, Frank and Tom Woods had turned to office development and, with Frescati Hall, they struck gold yet again. ACOT, the agricultural development authority, agreed to lease the entire building and this valuable state covenant enabled them to sell the block to the Bank of Ireland Pension Fund shortly after it was completed in 1980. In the same year, the Woods brothers paid £300,000 for less than half an acre of land in Leeson Close, off Lower Leeson Street – a lot of money indeed for a back-lane car park which had served as a base for Dublin's first dandelion market. In fact, however, it was a real bargain. Like a long-lost pharaoh's tomb, the Leeson Close site contained unimaginable riches – specifically, the mumified remains of an ancient planning permission which, for the sake of the city, would have been better left undisturbed. The permission was for a seven-storey office block and it had been granted way back in 1957, long before the office boom got under way. Amazingly, it had faced no opposition in the planning department at the time, despite the fact that everything appeared to be against it. It was grossly out of scale with the mews houses on the lane; it would obviously create traffic problems in the area, a point made by the Corporation's engineering department in

an objection to the proposal; there was no precedent, other than the ESB's first block, for such a monstrously intrusive building on such a cramped site in such a sensitive Georgian area. In view of this, it was extraordinary that the Corporation planning department raised no objection – however tentative – to the application. This may not have been unrelated to the fact that at the time, the site was owned by one Fred Nowlan, whose brother, Kevin I. Nowlan, was deputy chief planning officer of Dublin Corporation. Kevin I. Nowlan was not himself a party to the decision to grant the planning permission, but it is possible that out of deference to him his colleagues decided not to queer the pitch for his brother.

Years later, the Leeson Close site was sold for £250,000 to Brendan Flynn, of Percy Place renown, and it looked as if he would breathe life into Fred Nowlan's nasty scheme. However, by the time work was due to start in 1974, Flynn's little property empire had collapsed and his financial backers were closing in fast. The site was repossessed by Chase and Bank of Ireland, who sat on it ever so quietly until the Woods brothers arrived on the scene six years later. They lost no time in getting the project under way and employed Edmund Baylon Burke, who handled the Hackettsland scheme, to do a creative reconstruction of the faded and dog-eared drawings for the Leeson Close office block. Burke had previous experience of shovelling incongruous and over-sized buildings into Georgian backland areas. He was the architect for a multi-level car park in Fitzwilliam Lane, between Baggot Street and Merrion Square. This pre-cast concrete horror, which has all the allure of a toothless crone, was inflicted on the area – with the approval of Bobby Molloy – by an outfit called the St James Property Company. Its directors included swinging solicitor Denis Murnaghan whose father, Judge George Murnaghan, was called out of retirement by Fianna Fáil in 1982 to serve as chairman of Bord Pleanala. Young Murnaghan's most publicised business venture was the ill-fated Fiesta Club in Talbot Street, which failed miserably despite the lascivious attractions of its Playboy-style bunny girls, the 'Fiesta Fawns'. As Murnaghan retreated to the relative sanctuary of his legal practice, the Fitzwilliam Lane car park was sold to the ESB in 1977 for £200,000 and, since then, it

has been used exclusively by the board's many car-commuting employees.

Meanwhile, without saying a word to anyone, Frank and Tom Woods started building their Leeson Close office block on foot of the highly-questionable 1957 planning permission. They had unearthed a treasure trove and nobody was going to be allowed to get in their way. Work continued at a furious pace and for a very good reason – the permission, now all of twenty-four years old, was due to expire on 1 November 1981. By April, the reinforced concrete structure was substantially complete and it was only then that the Woods brothers went to the Corporation. They sought approval for a variety of alterations and this was granted without much hesitation. The planners had no option. Though such an outrageous scheme would never be approved under current planning policy, they were hog-tied by the 1957 permission, which was still valid. Leeson Street residents were horrified by what was happening and they appealed to Bord Pleanala. But after the oral hearing in September 1981, the board ruled that the principle of an office development on the site had been established in 1957 and it could see no objection to the details. The owner of a nearby mews office building sought a High Court injunction to stop the scheme dead in its tracks, but this was refused for the same reason. A local resident went all the way to the Supreme Court with an action challenging the validity of the development, but this was also thrown out. Not for the first time, the Woods brothers had taken on all comers and beaten them hollow. And when they finished their wretched office block in 1982, they even got retrospective permission to 'retain' unauthorised departures from the approved plans. Truly, the chickens hatched so long ago by Fred Nowlan had come home to roost.

The Woods brothers were not the only speculators in the Frankenstein monster business, giving new life to wicked old permissions. Ken Rohan had done just that in Eglinton Road, and the same death-defying feat was performed by the high and mighty Construction Industry Federation. The CIF, a powerful lobby and propaganda mouthpiece for the big developers, was well known for its virulently anti-conservation views. Indeed, the federation even argued for the scrapping

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third parties would be silenced just as it was in 1981 when the federation itself dug up an eight-year-old office permission on the banks of the Grand Canal. The permission was for a grossly disproportionate six-storey development, sandwiched between a row of cottages on the canal road and a terrace of artisan houses in Athlumney Villas, a quiet cul de sac off Ranelagh Road. Formerly a builder's yard, the site had been acquired in 1972 by a minor speculator called Fergus Morton who hired Delaney McVeigh and Pike to draw up plans for two large office blocks. The Corporation tried to uphold the residential zoning of the area by refusing permission, but Bobby Molloy overturned this decision on appeal – without offering any explanation – and Morton promptly sold out for £300,000 to Associated Development Holdings. They went bust in 1977 and the still-undeveloped site was acquired by the ESB, which had plans to build a training centre there, but this scheme also came to nothing. Three years later, the CIF bought the property and immediately set about the task of resuscitating Molloy's permission, which was due to expire on 1 November 1981. In a plaintive letter to the Corporation, Michael Greene, a director of the CIF, urged a stay of execution to enable them to build the two office blocks. The completed development would, he said, be used by the federation as its new headquarters. There was no indication in his lengthy letter that the CIF's intentions were at least partly speculative. And though the Corporation had opposed the original scheme, the planners had little option but to comply with Greene's request. Local residents had no right of appeal against this decision because it merely involved extending a permission granted eight years earlier. Indeed, they didn't even know that they would have to live with an aggressive office development overlooking their homes until work started on the site. And when the whole scheme was finished in 1983, the CIF moved into one of the office blocks and brazenly placed the other one on the letting market. The federation only needed 20,000 square

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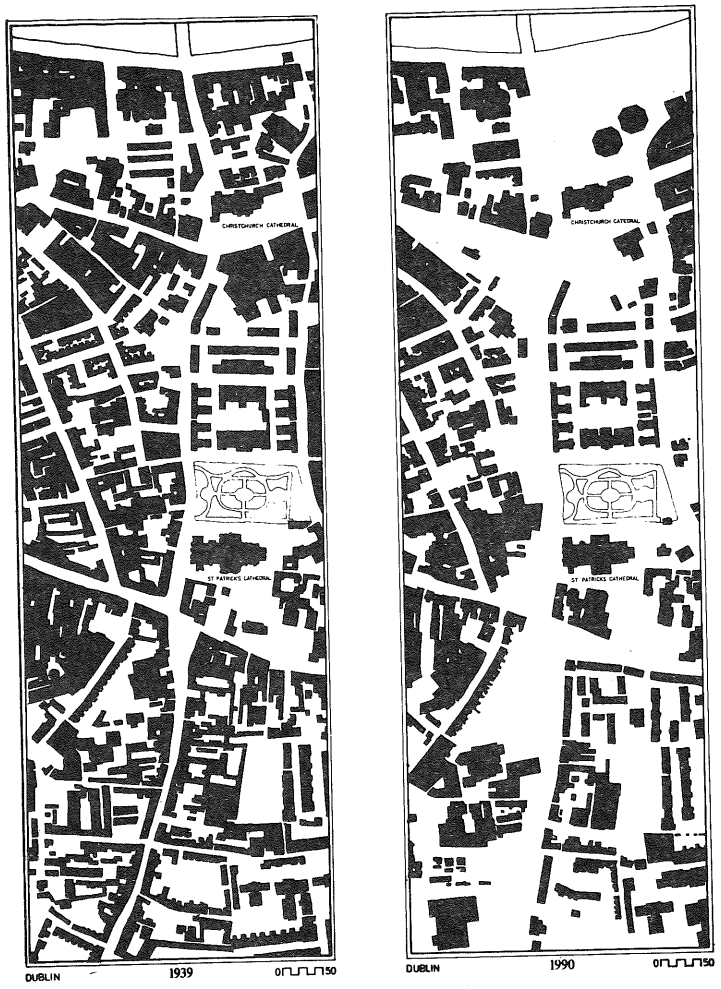
of *any* right of appeal by third parties against contentious planning decisions – conveniently ignoring the fact that 80 per cent of all appeals to Bord Pleanala came from developers themselves. If the CIF had its way, the already weak voice of third parties would be silenced just as it was in 1981 when the federation itself dug up an eight-year-old office permission on the banks of the Grand Canal. The permission was for a grossly disproportionate six-storey development, sandwiched between a row of cottages on the canal road and a terrace of artisan houses in Athlumney Villas, a quiet cul de sac off Ranelagh Road. Formerly a builder's yard, the site had been acquired in 1972 by a minor speculator called Fergus Morton who hired Delaney McVeigh and Pike to draw up plans for two large office blocks. The Corporation tried to uphold the residential zoning of the area by refusing permission, but Bobby Molloy overturned this decision on appeal – without offering any explanation – and Morton promptly sold out for £300,000 to Associated Development Holdings. They went bust in 1977 and the still-undeveloped site was acquired by the ESB, which had plans to build a training centre there, but this scheme also came to nothing. Three years later, the CIF bought the property and immediately set about the task of resuscitating Molloy's permission, which was due to expire on 1 November 1981. In a plaintive letter to the Corporation, Michael Greene, a director of the CIF, urged a stay of execution to enable them to build the two office blocks. The completed development would, he said, be used by the federation as its new headquarters. There was no indication in his lengthy letter that the CIF's intentions were at least partly speculative. And though the Corporation had opposed the original scheme, the planners had little option but to comply with Greene's request. Local residents had no right of appeal against this decision because it merely involved extending a permission granted eight years earlier. Indeed, they didn't even know that they would have to live with an aggressive office development overlooking their homes until work started on the site. And when the whole scheme was finished in 1983, the CIF moved into one of the office blocks and brazenly placed the other one on the letting market. The federation only needed 20,000 square

feet of space, but insisted on building double that figure to provide a tidy income for its pension fund. Truly, the mouthpiece for the speculators had joined their ranks.



Maps prepared by the City Architecture Studio showing the dramatic depletion of Dublin's built fabric in the area stretching from Wood Quay southwards beyond St Patrick's Cathedral. At left, the still coherent layout of this area in 1939 and, right, what it will look like in 1990 when the Corporation has completed its road-widening and 'redevelopment' schemes.

Thirteen

'Over the years the Gallagher Group have been proud of the part they played in the growing Ireland. Planning, designing and building commercial properties which have proved to be elegant testimony to their flair and expertise. Creating shopping complexes ideal to trade in, a pleasure to use. And making a leading contribution to the commercial morale of the country by creating office accommodation that sets a lead in the aesthetically functional. As long as Ireland grows, the Gallagher Group will be part of that growth. Building a better Ireland . . . better.'

By 1980, *Hibernia* was headlining what it called, with only a hint of hyperbole, the 'martyrdom' of St Stephen's Green. 'The Green is being dismembered not site by site, but side by side. Its west side is a builders' yard, its east side pastiche and its south side a motorway.' The worst fears of conservationists had been realised. After fifteen years of relentless pillage, this once-fine urban space was now comprehensively defiled. Commentators were writing about the 'rape' of the Green, but what happened was really more like a gang-bang in which the shameless participants kept coming back for more. Great chunks of its fabric had disappeared and what hadn't been replaced by modern office blocks, with or without Georgian clothing, was left to fester and rot until it suited the developers to renew it.

The battle for Hume Street turned out to be but a brief interlude in the redevelopment of St Stephen's Green and having paused, as it were, for a minute's silence, the wreckers soon got back to work. Just eight months after the end of the Hume Street occupation, Hardwicke – in collaboration with London-based Imry Properties – demolished the four surviving Georgian buildings between Hainault House and the

corner of Earlsfort Terrace. A nondescript group of little architectural interest, they were replaced by a five-storey office block, clad in pre-cast Armagh limestone panelling. Designed by Tyndall Hogan Hurley and completed in 1972, Canada House was named in honour of its tenants, who included the Canadian Embassy, Canada Life and the Bank of Nova Scotia. Ten years later, in a dramatic illustration of the transience of modern construction methods, pieces of the building began falling into the street. Tests established that much of the pre-cast panelling was defective and, as a temporary measure, it was crudely patched with coloured cement while Hardwicke haggled about who would foot the bill. Since it looked as if the entire facade would have to be replaced, the final reckoning could exceed £2 million – almost four times what the block cost to build in the first place. But Hardwicke couldn't seek redress from the main contractor or the manufacturer of the panelling because both companies had long since gone out of business, so they lodged a huge claim for damages against the consulting engineers, Ove Arup, and the architects, Tyndall Hogan Hurley. For Brian Hogan, in particular, the law suit was a bitter blow. After all, his happy working relationship with Hardwicke stretched all the way back to Lansdowne House and he had also been instrumental in establishing the Mont Kavanagh award for 'investment architecture'. But Kavanagh had died in 1978 and the management of Hardwicke's fortunes was now in the hands of his son Mark, an unsentimental ex-hippie who had shown his flair for business in Captain America's, Dublin's first hamburger restaurant. The hapless Hogan would just have to grin and bear it.

Across the Green, near the corner of Kildare Street, Lisney's pulled down Maison Prost, for long the city's most exclusive hairdressing salon, to make way for a modern office block. It was, of course, entirely fitting that the largest and most successful auctioneering firm in Dublin should have a sparkling new headquarters. In 1970, the year they got planning permission for the development, Lisney's chartered a champagne-laden Boeing 737 to fly a high-level gathering of executives to Cork for the opening of their offices in the southern capital. 'No one would be better able to stand the

expense of an air tour and champagne than Lisney's, for if there is one firm that has cleaned up on the redevelopment of Dublin, it is them', *Plan* commented. In fairness, their new headquarters, a Miesian gem in white-painted steel, is one of the finest examples of modern infill in Dublin. Indeed, its contribution to the streetscape was recognised internationally in 1975 when the architects, Scott Tallon Walker, won a high commendation for their work in the European Architectural Heritage Year awards.

The same firm also designed the adjoining Scottish Provident office block, which was meant to look like a separate building though the elevation differs only in detail from Lisney's. Originally, it was marked out by its colour, a beautiful shade of olive green, but Scottish Provident stupidly decided to paint it all white, just like their next-door neighbour, and the two buildings now read as one. The insurance company's insensitivity in this matter was almost as remarkable as the price they paid for the site. Formerly occupied by an ESB showrooms, the property had been sold by tender in 1972 for £175,000 – a steep enough sum for less than 5,000 square feet of land. At a Lisney's auction in January 1974, it was re-sold to Scottish Provident for £565,000 – in round figures, the staggering equivalent of £5 million an acre. The beneficiary of this sensational coup was Ottermeade Properties, an offshore outfit set up by Robert Morton, leading light in the Cheshire-based M. W. Design Partnership. By then, of course, Morton had forsaken architectural package deals in favour of a much more direct role in the market, and the money he made on the Scottish Provident deal helped to provide a secure foundation for his latest vehicle, the grandiloquently-titled European Property Corporation.

Joe McMenamin, king of the site assemblers, also hoped to make a big killing in St Stephen's Green. Through Bute Investments, he bought up two Georgian buildings at the corner of York Street late in 1973 and got planning permission soon afterwards for a fake-Georgian office block on the site. But instead of selling out to some developer, as he usually did, McMenamin decided to build the block himself. Everything seemed to be going smoothly until he made the fatal error of bringing in a demolition crew before he had

even paid for the property. Drummonds Seeds had agreed to sell their old premises to Bute Investments, but they were still waiting for the money. So when McMenamin started pulling the place down in August 1974, they slapped a High Court injunction on him. Like many other developers with far-flung property assets, Joe was suffering from an acute shortage of cash and he tried to solve this problem by moving into the high-turnover supermarket business. In March 1975, when the Lipton's chain came up for sale, Five Star acquired the thirteen larger stores and McMenamin picked up the rest – a total of twenty-five shops, mainly in the Dublin area. Within months, he was selling off the less profitable outlets one-by-one while the stores that remained in business provided him with a steady supply of free cash for his property ventures. Thus, he was able to pay off Drummonds and complete the demolition of their Stephen's Green premises. By June 1976, McMenamin had employed over £220,000 from Lipton's. But Checkout Holdings, through which he controlled the dwindling chain of shops, had by now become insolvent. The man who once defined his trade as 'accumulating money' was in trouble. Liquidators were appointed and there was also an unprecedented investigation by the Department of Industry and Commerce.

Inevitably, the Stephen's Green site was drawn into the liquidation. Bute Investments had run up a debt of £780,000 with Lombard and Ulster, on whose instructions the property was put up for sale in October 1977. By then, it had been derelict for two years and McMenamin hadn't even bothered to clear away the rubble of the buildings he demolished. 'Is there another city in the world that would tolerate such conduct by a developer?', *Hibernia* asked. 'Bombed-out premises in the most remote corners of Belfast are cleared and paved within a week. But in Dublin's most important square, "developers" are allowed to create mountains of mouldy rubble and let them lie there with impunity.' The site was eventually cleared by its new owners, Algemene Bank Nederland, to make way for a modern office block, purpose-built as the Dutch bank's Irish headquarters. Scott Tallon Walker were the architects and, though no expense was spared, the building they designed is not at all as successful as

Lisney's or the Scottish Provident. The white granite cladding and dark tinted windows clash with the venerable classicism of the College of Surgeons, the lop-sided roofline is jarring when viewed from within the Green and the fact that the building is separated by a laneway from the fine pair of mid eighteenth-century houses next door doesn't help either. Still, ABN seemed just as happy about their new headquarters as they were when former Taoiseach Jack Lynch agreed to join the bank's Irish board of directors.

The greatest single body blow to the social life of the Green was the closure of the Russell Hotel in April 1974. For decades, the Russell had been Dublin's finest hotel, renowned for its *haute cuisine* when that was a rare commodity and for the special brand of hospitality provided by its owner, the legendary Ken Besson. In 1966, however, the Russell was taken over by the London-based Kingsley Windsor group and this change of ownership marked the beginning of the end. Quite fortuitously, nearby Wesley College had decided to move out to Ballinteer, leaving its large secluded site and complex of Victorian buildings open for redevelopment. The college agreed to sell out to Kingsley Windsor, who immediately unveiled plans for a multi-storey modern hotel on the site, with the old Russell being replaced by an office block. The scheme was drawn up by Scott Tallon Walker (then trading as Michael Scott and Partners) who, coincidentally, were also the architects for the new Wesley College. And though it was widely seen as a grave threat to the integrity of the Green, Bobby Molloy granted outline permission on appeal in July 1970. With this in the bag, Kingsley Windsor sold out to Sir Charles Forte, the Wimpey hamburger king, whose vast interests included the Trust House Forte hotel group and the Lyons chain of corner tea houses.

Forte, in the manner of all property tycoons, set about maximising site values still further by seeking permission for an even more gargantuan development – a thirteen-storey hotel and four seven-storey office blocks, all finished in bronze and tinted glass in the style of the Bank of Ireland in Baggot Street. Not surprisingly, conservationists reacted vigorously against this latest attempt by Ronnie Tallon to foist his Miesian vision on the city, and they strongly endorsed

the Corporation's decision to reject the scheme. And when Bobby Molloy granted permission in March 1973, the conditions he laid down met many of their objections. Not only was the overall height to be drastically reduced, but – and this really stung Tallon – the street frontages were to be in brick to match existing buildings on the Green. Even so, it was clear that Molloy's decision had sealed the fate of the Russell. When it closed down a year later, *Plan* predicted what would happen to Forte's scheme for the site. 'The offices are very likely to be built there, but the hotel, never. Spiralling site values have killed the Russell for good.'

Meanwhile, Forte's front company, Oriel Properties, had augmented the site by acquiring the burnt-out shell of the adjacent Methodist Centenary Church. The interior of the church had been destroyed by fire in 1968 and, after toying with various rebuilding plans, the small congregation finally accepted an ecumenical offer from the Church of Ireland to share Christ Church, in Leeson Park. With them out of the way, Forte commissioned Scott Tallon Walker to design a five-storey office block on the site, retaining the distinctive classical portico, which was listed for preservation. The plan was approved in 1974 but, by then, the recession had taken hold and Oriel Properties decided to sit it out. Four years later, they sold the site to P. V. Doyle for £300,000. Doyle, by now chairman of Bord Fáilte, had already made his *entrée* into the office sector with a typically-vulgar five-storey block on Shelbourne Road, behind his flagship Berkeley Court Hotel. He also had no difficulty in signing up such prestige state tenants as the National Board for Science and Technology, not to mention the Department of the Taoiseach.

Like most of P. V.'s productions, Shelbourne House was a pre-cast concrete job, built by his own construction company to a design by his ever-reliable architects, Henry J. Lyons and Partners. In the course of their long and lucrative relationship with Ireland's leading hotelier they rarely allowed *angst* to get in the way of his wishes. Thus, when he acquired the Methodist Centenary Church, they happily substituted cheaper pre-cast concrete units for the brick elevations designed by Scott Tallon Walker. They also seemed quite content to preside over the ruination of the supposedly pre-

served portico by allowing four large windows to be bashed into the front facade. And when Doyle bought the former Methodist church and hall in Charleston Road, Ranelagh, Henry J. Lyons and Partners developed a bout of schizophrenia. First, they sought permission for a change of use to offices on the basis that this would preserve two Victorian buildings 'of outstanding architectural merit'. A week later, they submitted alternative plans for a five-storey block of flats on the site, though this would have meant demolishing the buildings they had lately found so 'outstanding'. Fortunately, this scheme was rejected and Doyle later sold the Ranelagh property to Ambrose McInerney. He commissioned Chandler Lavin Associates to convert the church and hall into offices, and they set a headline for the imaginative re-use of old buildings by achieving this objective without sacrificing the Victorian fabric. Indeed, the finished product – Trinity House – is the most unusual and possibly the most attractive 'office block' in Dublin.

Meanwhile, the Russell/Wesley site had become one of the city's most prominent eyesores. The hotel and the college were both demolished before the end of 1974, but it was not until six years later that the redevelopment scheme got under way. In the intervening period, the 'developers' engaged in an endless tug-of-war with local residents over the fate of six Georgian houses lying between the ruins of the Russell and the old entrance to Wesley College. Forte's front company had paid outlandishly high prices for three of the houses in 1973 and then left them to go derelict. But despite constant badgering, the remaining owners steadfastly refused to sell out – even though they could all have made a fortune by doing so. Instead, under the leadership of Maureen Concannon-O'Brien, they formed the St Stephen's Green Protection Association and pledged themselves to defend what was left of the Green's residential stock. And when Oriel Properties defied an order from Bord Pleanala to maintain the houses they owned, members of the association moved in to carry out essential repairs. Through their vigilance, the houses survived to be refurbished – ever so reluctantly – as the token residential element of what had become an overwhelmingly office-based scheme. The pretence about building a new hotel

had long since been abandoned and by 1979, when Forte sold the site to Irish Life, there was full planning permission for a dense-pack office development. Like most of Irish Life's schemes, what was built on the site of the Russell had little to do with architecture. Scott Tallon Walker's primary role was to produce buildings that would, quite literally, *contain* over 130,000 square feet of lettable office space. The result, therefore, is a series of brick-clad boxes, five to seven storeys high and randomly arranged around a tarmacadam driveway which Irish Life called 'Stokes Place', in honour of its principal tenants, Stokes Kennedy Crowley.

Diagonally opposite 'Stokes Place', on the Cuffe Street corner of the Green, is the equally-large Ardilaun development – a graphic illustration in bricks and mortar of what *Plan* characterised as the 'social conspiracy' between City Hall bureaucrats and well-heeled developers. Since 1960, the Corporation's road engineers had been pursuing plans to convert Cuffe Street into a six-lane dual carriageway. Thus, when a clutter of tenements at the western end were demolished in the early 1960s, they ensured that the new blocks of Corporation flats would be set back far enough to accommodate their road-widening line. In 1968, they made a compulsory purchase order for properties at the Green end – including a famous corner pub, the Winter Garden Palace – and Kevin Boland confirmed the CPO two years later, riding roughshod over almost 2,000 objections. It was obvious that the proposed road widening would open up a large area to redevelopment, and into the breach stepped Kennedy Kisch, boss man of MEPC (Ireland). Before the ink was dry on the CPO, he was busily assembling a two-acre site at the corner of the Green, wrapping around the granite-faced Unitarian Church. And what he wasn't able to acquire on the open market he bought from the Corporation in several private deals. Indeed, the two parties worked hand-in-glove with each other, buying and selling land in the CPO area until each had achieved its objectives.

Kennedy Kisch always chose his sites with care. In 1969, for example, MEPC paid £300,000 for Crawford's garage, on the corner of Hatch Street and Earlsfort Terrace, and then got planning permission for a seven-storey office block, designed by Costello Murray and Beaumont. This building, which is at least two floors higher than it should have been, blotted out forever a cherished view of the great dome of Rathmines Church from the east side of St Stephen's Green. And despite its impressive deep-modelled facade, the use of dark-brown brick and bronze-tinted glazing makes the block look almost black, especially from a distance. Leased by the Revenue Commissioners on completion in 1972, it was named Teach Earlsfort and sold three years later to Royal Insurance for £2.3 million.

There was much more at stake than a low-slung garage or the view of a copper dome in MEPC's development on Stephen's Green. The area bounded by Cuffe Street, Cuffe Lane and the Green was a veritable hive of urban activities until Kennedy Kisch and the Corporation engineers dug their teeth into it. Apart from a strong residential element, mainly in flats above ground-floor level, it had a fascinating mix of uses. There were shops dealing in groceries, vegetables, handcrafts and antiques as well as tobacconists, a furrier, an optician, two restaurants and two schools, a church, theatre and printing works, a pipe manufacturer, a solicitor's office, a bank, two building and decorating contractors and, of course, the Winter Garden Palace. All of this, except for the church and theatre (the Damer Hall), was to be wiped out in the comprehensive *blitzkrieg* planned by MEPC, in association with the Corporation. And though many of the owners and occupiers of the buildings scheduled for demolition left without a whimper, not everyone took it lying down.

Most obstinate of all was Mary Benson, an elderly lady who had lived beside the corner pub for over fifty years. Like a true urban heroine, she fought the proposed demolition of her home to the bitter end. At one stage, when the sheriff and his bailiffs arrived to evict her, she went to a window on the top floor, sat out on the ledge and warned that she would jump unless they agreed to leave at once. Sheepishly, they backed down the stairs and left in a great hurry. At an oral hearing on MEPC's plans in June 1975, she openly confronted her persecutors. 'The Corporation', she declared, 'is just a horrible body – aggressive and threatening, full of cunning and deceit. I am not going to move for them or for

anybody. If they pull the house down, I shall still be in it. If they move me out by force, it will mean my death.' But the forces ranged against her were overwhelming and, at the age of seventy-two, she could not resist them forever. Six months later, she reluctantly left her long-time home and, within weeks, it had been demolished along with several adjoining buildings. Miss Benson was offered £19,800 in compensation for the loss of her property, but she steadfastly refused to accept the money, on the grounds that the Corporation had forcibly acquired it under false pretences. Her home was not demolished for the road-widening scheme, she insisted, but only as part of the Corporation's 'back-room deal' with MEPC. It wasn't until 1983 that she finally relented, accepting the pittance on offer from City Hall.

It didn't seem to matter to the Corporation that the Cuffe Street road-widening would gouge out a whole corner of the Green, destroying its cohesion as an urban square. Or that the MEPC development was, as the Living City Group said, mere 'architectural plastic surgery' designed to cover up the damage already wrought by City Hall's scheming. As far as the Corporation was concerned, the whole plan would 'upgrade a badly run-down area'. But though the site had been cleared by early 1976, it was to remain derelict for another four years – mainly because of MEPC's financial difficulties in the UK. Indeed, Kennedy Kisch himself was long dead and buried by the time construction work finally started in February 1980. And far from being a 'comprehensive redevelopment', the Ardilaun Centre turned out to be just another agglomeration of office blocks, engulfing the Unitarian Church on three sides. The promised ground-floor shops did not, of course, materialise and the only non-office use consisted of a three-storey block of luxury flats, tucked into Cuffe Lane as a throwaway afterthought. Worse still, by sticking to a strict rectangular grid instead of following the widened line of Cuffe Street, Costello Murray and Beaumont left the rear balconies of Mercer House flats, washing lines and all, exposed to full-frontal view from as far away as Leeson Street. But MEPC had got what they wanted – an office complex of 130,000 square feet – and

the Department of Posts and Telegraphs obligingly agreed to lease the bulk of it as a new headquarters for Telecom Eireann. Then, the offices were left vacant for almost three years, at a cost to the taxpayer in squandered rent conservatively estimated at £2 million.

The Ardilaun Centre, like so many other long-dormant developments, had been brought to life on the crest of a wave of confidence generated by Fianna Fáil's landslide victory in the 1977 general election. The party's spendthrift policies, faithfully based on its reckless election manifesto, fuelled a false boom in the economy – especially in the construction industry, where Fianna Fáil had some of its most ardent supporters. There was a huge increase in public sector employment, paid for by massive foreign borrowing, and this was inevitably translated into an upsurge in demand for new office space. As site values and rental levels soared to unimaginable heights, it was bonanza time again for the speculative developers. With their pent-up energy stored during the torpor of the mid-1970s, they were back on the rampage like a herd of bull elephants. The dust was blown off long-shelved plans for office developments large and small, and the city's skyline was soon a-clutter with high cranes. Given an average lead-time of two to three years, even for off-the-shelf schemes, it took a while before all of this frenetic activity was reflected in the annual output of new office space. But the results, when they came, could not have been more dramatic. In 1979, the worst year on record, speculative developers completed just two office blocks, yielding a miserable 55,000 square feet of space. The comparable figure for 1980, however, was more than 460,000 square feet, spread through sixteen different developments. And in 1981, zenith of the Fianna Fáil-induced boom, the spec developers finished twenty-five separate schemes, producing a grand total of 675,000 square feet of new office space.

With property once again a sure-fire winner, the financial institutions were climbing over each other in a mad scramble to lend money for speculation. After years of recession and inactivity, there was a vast store of lucre in unit trust and pension funds, and this was all released onto the market in one great avalanche. Irish Life, the acknowledged giant

among insurance companies, was in a particularly strong position to cash in on the boom. It had built up substantial reserves from an ever-expanding pool of policy-holders and, at Michael Lucey's instigation, these funds were invested in the acquisition and redevelopment of well-known derelict sites, such as the Russell. Lucey also picked up the High School site in Harcourt Street, where a British developer, Guardian Properties, had abandoned work on a large office project after being forced into liquidation in 1975. Before going bust, Guardian managed to leave Dublin with an appalling legacy – the abominably aggressive twins, Castle House and Wicklow House in South Great George's Street. These pre-cast concrete horrors, with their heavy horizontal banding and aluminium-fronted ground-floor shops, were built on the site of Pim's, the fondly-remembered Victorian department store. As designed by London-based architects Arthur Swift and Partners, they are unedifying examples of monstrously-insensitive street architecture, equalled only by the worst schemes perpetrated in some of the more botched British cities. One of the blocks is now owned by Norwich Union, which helped to finance the development, while the other belongs to the Aer Lingus Pension Fund. And needless to say, all of the office space is let to the state.

Irish Life's development on the old High School site is no better. Preposterously called 'Harcourt Square', it consists of a central slab block, eight storeys high, flanked by two elongated five-storey blocks, set around a finicky 'landscaped' forecourt. Designed by Michael Lucey's favourite architects, Keane Murphy Duff, the complex had been likened by some to a women's penitentiary while others say it has all the appearance of an Albanian mental asylum. But for Lucey, Harcourt Square turned out to be a real moneyspinner. The whole lot was leased in advance by the Office of Public Works, mainly to provide a new headquarters for the Dublin metropolitan division of the gardai. Traditionally, the gardai had been housed in Dublin Castle, for the very good reason that it was the most secure location in the city. And though much of their accommodation was substandard, they did have a modern office block outside the Ship Street gate, rented from an outfit with the oddly-appropriate name of Lugnagun

Ltd. The OPW could have met their demand for more and better space by refurbishing the many vacant buildings within the Castle walls. Instead, without apparently consulting the gardai, the state's servants rushed into a leasing agreement with Irish Life and then had to spend considerable sums of public money adapting the office complex to make it as secure as the Castle. With all of this extra work, added to the extreme reluctance of the gardai to move, the new offices remained vacant for almost three years – at an overall cost to the taxpayer which exceeded £3 million.

Meanwhile, Irish Life was laughing all the way to the bank. Between 1980 and 1982, the company completed no less than 362,000 square feet of modern office space in the city and every bit of it was let without difficulty to various branches of the state bureaucracy. Others encountered extraordinary problems in finding state tenants and quite the most bizarre case involved Sean Lemass House, the office development built on the site of St Vincent's Hospital. As Taoiseach, Liam Cosgrave had presided at the official opening of the block in May 1976, but even his endorsement of its re-created Georgiana did not produce any tenants – despite the prime location on St Stephen's Green. Fianna Fáil returned to power in June 1977 and, just four months later, the entire development was purchased by John Byrne's Carlisle Trust group for about £4 million. It was Byrne's intention to hold the 78,000 square foot block as a long-term investment and, to make it worthwhile, he set about signing up a state tenant. Given his track record and the fact that Fianna Fáil was back in office, this should have been a relatively easy proposition. So he began trawling the civil service for likely takers and soon netted a big catch in the Department of Fisheries. They were very keen to lease most of the space in Sean Lemass House and a deal had been just about concluded when it all fell through, in very mysterious circumstances. Byrne then tried the Department of Posts and Telegraphs, a voracious consumer of rented offices, and thought he had hooked them but, here again, it came to nothing. Wherever he turned, he found himself facing a brick wall. And this wall, it transpired, was the Minister for Finance, George Colley. He personally vetoed any and all proposals to lease Sean Lemass House

because he was convinced that his arch-rival, Charlie Haughey, had a stake in Byrne's property empire. At the time, Haughey was serving in the same cabinet as Minister for Health and Social Welfare.

Byrne knew that he was beaten and in April 1979, after eighteen months of frustration, he sold out for £5.4 million – giving himself and the Carlisle Trust's other shareholders a tidy profit of £1 million. The purchaser was Patrick Gallagher, for whom Byrne had become a sort of surrogate father since the death of his own dad in 1974. The Kerry-born developer had been one of Matt Gallagher's closest friends and it was only natural that he should take Matt's young son under his protective wing. Their unusually close relationship was cemented by other links. For many years, they shared the same architect, Desmond FitzGerald, and the same solicitor, Gore and Grimes, of Cavendish Row, where John Gore-Grimes looked after the interests of the Gallagher Group while his brother Anthony handled the affairs of the Carlisle Trust. But Gallagher's sentimental attachment for Byrne did not get in the way of his biggest-ever property coup. In June 1979, a month after closing the deal to purchase Sean Lemass House, the young tycoon had re-sold the property to the Irish Permanent Building Society, who set up headquarters there and promptly renamed it 'Edmund Farrell House'. The price was £7.5 million, netting Gallagher a profit of £2.1 million in just thirty days. It came as a deep shock to ordinary people that rampant speculation could produce such staggering rewards, but the money men around town were thrilled to the point of sheer ecstacy. For them, the coup underlined the alluring glamour of property and confirmed Matt Gallagher's son as the man with the Midas touch.

The banks were prepared to advance any sum, no matter how astronomical, for whatever project Gallagher had in mind. Thus, when he paid £1 million for Straffan House, a palatial Co. Kildare mansion on 300 acres of land, the Northern Bank Finance Corporation obligingly lent him the money. And when Gallagher wanted to buy No. 16 St Stephen's Green, the largest semi-detached house in Ireland, the NBFC stumped up another £1 million from its coffers. Formerly the headquarters of the Presbyterian Association, this

splendid mid-Georgian building had passed through the hands of T. G. McVeagh and Co, the Rhatigan brothers, Slater Walker and McKone Estates before Gallagher bought it in December 1978. Using Keane Murphy Duff as his architects, he refurbished the house and built an ugly five-storey office block in the back garden, which was let to the ESB in June 1981 at a rent of £250,000 a year. At the same time, Gallagher completed another office development on the site of Jury's Hotel, in College Green. The renowned Victorian hotel had closed down in 1973 after Jury's bought the Intercontinental in Ballsbridge and its fittings were dispersed far and wide, the ornately-carved mahogany bar ending up in Zurich. Killiney hotelier Paddy Fitzpatrick attempted to buy Jury's later in the hope of saving the old place, but sadly the deal fell through. Instead, the property was acquired by a group of speculators, prominently starring auctioneer John Finnegan, and they made a sizeable killing when Gallagher bought it in July 1979 for more than £700,000. The old building was demolished a year later and, in less than ten months, it had been replaced by a silvery granite-clad office block with projecting bay windows, designed by Burke-Kennedy Doyle and Partners. As quick as a flash, it was let to the Department of Posts and Telegraphs, who left it empty for two years at a cost in wasted rent of over £½ million.

Like John Byrne in the good old days, Patrick Gallagher never had any trouble filling his office blocks with state tenants. The fact that he was a close personal friend of Charlie Haughey was obviously no handicap. Indeed, Gallagher was one of the few non-politicians present at the Leinster House press conference to announce Haughey's stunning victory over Colley in the bitter battle to succeed Jack Lynch as Taoiseach in December 1979. Haughey had also been a friend of Patrick's father, and it was to Matt that he had sold his fifty-acre Grangemore estate near Raheny way back in 1969. It was a controversial deal, worth over £200,000, because Haughey had availed of a device in his own Finance Act to avoid paying any tax on his windfall gain. Thus enriched, he was able to buy the 200-acre Abbeyville demesne at Kinsealy, while Gallagher covered the Grangemore property in housing. Patrick and he were often seen lunching together

in the Berkeley Court Hotel. They shared a passionate interest in horses, though Gallagher's investments were not always judicious. At a time when most people were finding it hard to make ends meet, he paid £750,000 for a quarter-share in a two-year-old colt called Try My Best. This expensive nag ended up at the back of the field in the 1978 English 2000 Guineas and then had to be sold off at a loss. And while Haughey quietly concentrated on building up a good breeding stock, Gallagher splurged out and bought himself a racecourse – the Phoenix Park track and its Tudor-style buildings where once the British Viceroy had his own box.

Gallagher's success in letting his office blocks to state tenants helped enormously in paving the way for another coup. In November 1981, he put three of them together in a package – the Jury's block, No. 16 St Stephen's Green and his earlier scheme in Clare Street – and sold the lot for £11 million to a pension fund managed by Allied Irish Investment Bank. All of these developments, not forgetting the destruction of Molesworth Street, were tinged by vandalism, yet Gallagher had the gall to take out a full-page advertisement in An Taisce's *Journal* – of all places – to eulogise his achievements. 'Over the years', it read, 'the Gallagher Group have been proud of the part they played in the growing Ireland. Planning, designing and building commercial properties which have proved to be elegant testimony to their flair and expertise. Creating shopping complexes ideal to trade in, a pleasure to use. And making a leading contribution to the commercial morale of the country by creating office accommodation that sets a lead in the aesthetically functional. As long as Ireland grows, the Gallagher Group will be part of that growth. Building a better Ireland . . . better.'

Clearly, young Patrick was growing hubristic. He boasted that the Gallagher Group had multiplied twenty-fold since he took over from his father and predicted that its turnover would soon top £160 million a year. His deals became more stupendous and breathtaking, like the daredevil feats of a circus performer. There was a £10 million 'land swop' with housebuilders Tommy Brennan and Joe McGowan, under which Gallagher gave away Hollywood Rath, the Mulhuddart stud farm where he spent his childhood, as well as cash and

development land in return for a house in Hume Street, another stud farm in Co. Meath, 300 acres of land at Fortunestown, near Tallaght, and the former premises of Smyth's of the Green, Dublin's premier purveyors of fine foods. Gallagher was not, however, the undertaker of Smyth's. That role had been performed by Ian Cairnduff, the chartered accountant husband of society hostess and hagiographer Maureen Cairnduff. Through Parnell Investments, Cairnduff had a majority shareholding in Smyth's and it was he who closed down the long-established epicurean landmark in March 1975 – purely to realise the value of its property at Nos. 6 and 7 St Stephens Green. Three years later, the premises was sold to Brennan and McGowan for £425,000, netting Cairnduff and his associates a profit of £200,000. Brennan and McGowan did even better. After ejecting tenants who had been running a short-lived restaurant called Nobody's, they made at least £750,000 by selling out to Gallagher in May 1980. Then, at enormous expense to the Bank of Ireland, the whole place was converted into the remarkably unsuccessful Galleria shopping centre.

Meanwhile, Patrick had moved on to what he hoped would be the coup to end all coups. Since 1966, a company called Lambert Jones Estates had been busily engaged in the assembly of a 4½-acre site on the west side of the Green, stretching all the way down South King Street. The company was a front for South African businessman Ralph Slazenger and his wife Gwendolin, who had made their home on the 14,000-acre Powerscourt Demesne, in Co. Wicklow. Assisted by Lisney's and bankrolled by the NBFC and the First National Bank of Chicago, Slazenger bought out the interests of more than 150 individual property owners in a relentless acquisition programme extending over a period of fifteen years. As the mainly Georgian buildings on the site became steadily more decrepit, the Slazenger interests hatched plans for a mammoth office and shopping development, with a gross floor area of almost half-a-million square feet. Their architects, Scott Tallon Walker, argued that this gargantuan scheme would 'rejuvenate a worn-out section of the city' but, though planning permission was granted in 1975, nothing was done to implement it. The recession had begun to bite and,

with bank interest rates rising inexorably, Lisney's devised 'Gaiety Green' – a complex of small shops, let on a short-term basis to generate much-needed revenue. For almost four years, this trashy enclave with its bustling weekend Dandelion Market was the city's leading 'alternative' attraction, especially for young people. But that all came to an end when the Slazengers, prompted by an upturn in the property market, put the huge site up for sale in 1980. Lisney's had a lot of trouble trying to off-load it, however. For most developers, the parcel was simply too large to be viable and it was also complicated by some 'messy' agreements, notably with the Green Cinema.

These major drawbacks did not deter Patrick Gallagher and, in April 1981, he agreed to purchase the property for £10.5 million. He did the deal by acquiring shares in the Slazenger company – an artful dodge often used by speculators to avoid tax on their transactions. And though Lambert Jones Estates had a nominal share capital of £500,000, only £2 was actually paid up and even this paltry sum was subdivided into two 100 penny shares which, in turn, were held by four Slazenger companies in the Isle of Man. More incredibly, Gallagher gained control of perhaps the largest prime site ever to come on the market in Dublin for a down-payment of £50,000 – roughly the price of a modest detached house. And within weeks of doing the deal, he was up to his old tricks, trying to hawk the Slazenger site to Irish Life for almost £16 million. Then, after demolishing most of the original buildings, Gallagher underlined his contempt for the city by seeking permission to build a show house for his Fortunestown development right beside the College of Surgeons – apparently to spare prospective buyers the long trek out to Tallaght and back. Not surprisingly, the Corporation rejected this proposal describing it, with obvious understatement, as 'a misuse of this important centre city site'. The planners did, however, approve his scheme for the entire site – a woeful exercise in Georgian pastiche by Brian O'Halloran – and the thrusting tycoon confidently forecast that, within five years, the completed development would be worth £100 million.

Gallagher seemed unstoppable. As well as juggling with the

Slazenger site, he was spending another £1 million of the NBFC's money on a sumptuous refurbishment of Straffan House and pouring at least £2 million more into the lavish renovation of his Phoenix Park racecourse. Then, in January 1982, he agreed to buy the four-acre derelict site at Earlsfort Terrace from his uncles – Hubert, Patrick and James Gallagher – who had been sitting on it for more than ten years. The ageing Gallagher brothers, known affectionately as The Three Stooges because of their constant bickering, had persuaded the Corporation to extend the validity of their 1974 planning permission for a massive office development on the site. At a meeting with senior Corporation officials in July 1981, three months before the old permission was due to expire, James Gallagher feigned embarrassment over the appalling spectacle his weed-strewn property would present to patrons of the National Concert Hall, right across the street. He talked about how the redevelopment scheme would involve an investment of £40 million, creating five hundred jobs for construction workers and yielding the Corporation over £500,000 a year in rates revenue when it was all finished. John Prendergast, the official in charge of the planning department, had every reason to reject Gallagher's request. First, the scheme he was proposing to revive had been turned down by the Corporation itself eight years earlier. Secondly, it was now in serious conflict with the provisions of the City Development Plan – supposedly the Corporation's planning bible. Thirdly, as any property man around town could have told him, the deep-plan air conditioned offices envisaged in 1974 were no longer 'buildable'. And finally, the owners had no intention of proceeding with this or any other scheme on the Earlsfort Terrace site. They merely wanted the old permission extended to pave the way for a huge speculative gain on the sale of the property. But Prendergast was taken in by James Gallagher's assurances that work would start on the development 'in the near future' and he agreed to grant the five-year extension, as requested. Within weeks, Jones Lang Wooton had erected large billboards on the site advertising it for sale with full planning permission for well over 300,000 square feet of offices. The Corporation had been conned.

On 26 January 1982, the day before a budget widely expected to impose swingeing taxes on windfall profits from land speculation, the Gallaghers sold out to their nephew for £9.5 million. Given that they had assembled the site for less than £1 million and done precisely nothing with it, the price represented an '£8 million harvest for weed-growers', as a headline in the *Irish Times* said. Here again, Patrick Gallagher attempted to pull off another of his strokes. Having put down only a small deposit – £450,000 – he tried to flog the property in two lots to Hardwicke and London and Leeds for a total of £16 million. But just as Irish Life had baulked at the Slazenger site 'offer', they didn't rise to his Earlsfort Terrace bait. A month later, when it emerged he was bidding for the H. Williams supermarket chain, Gallagher found himself at the centre of media attention. He was filmed standing in St Stephen's Green for RTE's television news, the wilder elements of the popular press lionised him as 'The £500 Million Man' and *In Dublin* carried a major cover story under the immortal banner, 'Patrick Gallagher: Property Speculator and Brat'. Only *Business and Finance* scented the real truth – that the great tycoon was severely strapped for cash and his sole purpose in bidding for H. Williams was to get his hands on its turnover of £50 million a year. The end, when it came, came quickly. Amid rumours that the Gallagher Group was about to 'go under', it was announced that the offer for H. Williams was being withdrawn. Two days later, on 30 April, Gallagher's bankers put the group into receivership and Laurence Crowley, veteran of several major liquidations, moved into its unprepossessing headquarters at Donaghmede Shopping Centre.

It transpired that the Gallagher Group owed the banks almost £30 million – a spectacular level of indebtedness unmatched by any other company in Ireland except, perhaps, the country's leading industrial combines. The banks had flung money at Patrick Gallagher and he now had what amounted to a £30 million overdraft. Yet he had never employed more than three hundred workers, and when the receiver was called in, only half that number were on the payroll. For anyone who had ever received a snooty letter from the bank manager and, especially, for struggling businessmen who had been denied finance for projects to provide employment, it seemed utterly incredible that the banks had extended almost limitless credit facilities to someone who was, after all, a mere property speculator. Equally shocking was the fact that the banks involved in this shabby and discreditable activity were not small fry on the lunatic fringe. Indeed, they included most of the biggest and best-known names in the financial world. The Bank of Ireland, for example, was owed £7 million. So was Allied Irish Investment Bank. And the NBFC, investment banking arm of the Northern Bank, was exposed to the tune of £11 million. The rest of Gallagher's extraordinary debt was made up in smaller sums owed to the Ulster Investment Bank, United Dominions Trust, the First National Bank of Chicago and the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation. It was quite a collection.

Gallagher's own 'bank', Merchant Banking Ltd, collapsed with the rest of his property empire. In view of its symbiotic relationship with other subsidiaries of the Gallagher Group, this was not at all surprising. Over the years, an unusually high proportion of the bank's deposits had been loaned at very low interest rates to Gallagher companies. In theory, these recurring loans were secured by a debenture and floating charge on all the assets and property of the Gallagher Group. In practice, the debenture was rendered meaningless because, more often than not, it was charged on assets already mortgaged to the hilt with one or other of the mainstream banks. 'This is not good banking', as *Hibernia* noted in April 1979. 'If the Gallagher Group collapsed, it is highly likely that Merchant Banking would collapse along with it because of its overdependence on one borrower. . . . There seems to be no indication that the Gallaghers accept the principle that deposits should be independently invested in the interests of depositors and not merely used as a cheap source of funds by the Gallagher Group.' Indeed, when the crash came three years later, it emerged that there was a shortfall of more than £4 million, and the liquidator's report to the High Court showed that the bank had been 'operated and run by the directors with scandalous disregard not only for the Companies Act but also for the Central Bank Act'. In October 1984, on

on foot of this report, the Garda Fraud Squad was called in.

The more established developers privately gloated over Gallagher's misfortune. For them, he was far too brash and pushy, the kind of guy who brought their business into disrepute, and they were glad when he got his come-uppance. But they could not feel very sanguine about the wider implications of the Gallagher collapse. As all of them realised full well, it was merely a manifestation of something far more terrifying – the grim but inescapable fact that the bottom had fallen out of the property market. Some blamed the general economic recession, but this wasn't the real reason. Much more critical was the determined cutback in civil service employment and, consequently, the state's withdrawal from the office letting market it had underpinned for so long. Indeed, the OPW signed its last major leasing agreement in April 1982 – the same month that Gallagher went to the wall – and since then only a miniscule amount of office space has been taken up by the state sector. With their biggest customer now gone, the developers were devastated. Sites acquired at horrendously high prices during the ever-so-brief boom plummeted in value and, since there was no point in building unlettable office blocks, dozens of ambitious schemes had to be abandoned.

Behind every red-and-white hoarding there was a sob story, but none was more heart-rending than Charlie Kenny's. He had just started work on the first stage of a £50 million development at Kelly's Corner when the bubble burst, making nonsense of his plans to build 360,000 square feet of office space. The four-acre site had been created by the Corporation's proposal for a new road linking Harcourt Street and Camden Street, just south of Irish Life's 'Harcourt Square' development. With two existing streets – Charlotte Street and Old Camden Street – facing obliteration, the whole area steadily degenerated into little more than a shambles. Seeing that it was up for grabs, Joe McMenamin had been assembling property there since the late 1960s and, in 1979, he passed on his substantial holding to Charlie Kenny. But McMenamin hadn't tied up all the loose ends and this left Kenny with the problem of acquiring a great deal of property to complete the site. And because most of the owners were aware of his

plans, the prices he was forced to pay became progressively more outlandish. On the Harcourt Street frontage, facing the old railway station, Kenny was taken to the cleaners. The first house he bought there cost £80,000; for the last pair, he had to pay the staggering sum of £600,000. Obviously, even well-heeled developers can be cruelly exploited.

Since Kenny had spent a fortune on acquiring the site, it was not surprising that he should seek permission for what his architects, Burke-Kennedy Doyle, described as a 'very large-scale' scheme – indeed, the largest yet contemplated by a speculative developer. There were to be eight office blocks, ranging in height from six to nine storeys, two apartment buildings containing one hundred luxury flats, a neighbourhood shopping centre and new pubs to replace three existing licensed premises, one of which – the former Bleeding Horse – dates back to 1710. To the Dublin branch of An Taisce, the whole scheme smacked of a 'scorched earth' policy, with no attempt to retain worthwhile buildings, even the listed Georgian terrace on Harcourt Street. But Kenny managed to win the support of the trust's national officers, perhaps because he himself had just joined the conservation establishment as a director of the Irish Architectural Archive. This unseemly squabble within An Taisce's ranks was finally resolved when Kenny agreed to sign a covenant pledging that the apartments and other promised 'goodies' in his scheme would be built – eventually. He even found a new premises for Stein's opticians, whose eye-shaped shopfront on Harcourt Road was a unique 1950s design masterpiece. But the spoilsport planners, who were quite prepared to tolerate a proliferation of plastic fascias all over the city, wouldn't allow it to be re-erected in a nearby terrace of Edwardian shops on the grounds that it would be 'incongruous'. Meanwhile, the Corporation dallied inexcusably over the implementation of its road plans for the area, condemning Kelly's Corner to many more years in a blighted twilight zone. But even if the new road had been built on time, Charlie Kenny could not have completed the redevelopment of his site. Snookered by the collapse of the property market, he had to make do with only two office blocks at the corner of Harcourt Street and these buildings, with their deep-recessed windows and bulbous

glass protuberances, are all that we are likely to see of what was billed as a 'key exercise in urban renewal' – at least until the market improves.

The fall-out from Patrick Gallagher's precipitate tumble dramatically underlined the fragile fortunes of property. A month before the banks called in the receiver, he had valued his group's assets at £60 million. Just one year later, in May 1983, their estimated realisable value had sunk to only £26 million – well below what he owed the banks, never mind the ordinary creditors. In the process, Gallagher lost Straffan House, Dolanstown Stud and Castle Howard, a Gothic pile in Co. Wicklow where younger brother Paul had briefly resided, as well as £2 million worth of bloodstock and his cherished Rolls Royce. H. Williams, the target of his last desperate throw, fell into the hands of rival developer Finbarr Holland while the ill-fated Phoenix Park track was sold to a consortium headed by racing figures Vincent O'Brien and Robert Sangster, with Hardwicke's Mark Kavanagh laying on discos and hamburger joints in a bid to make it viable. But the jewels in Gallagher's crown, his two large sites in and around St Stephen's Green, were not available to the group's receiver. Because he had made only a small down-payment in each case, both sites reverted to their original owners. In the case of Earlsfort Terrace, Gallagher's uncles pocketed his £450,000 deposit, as they had every right to do, and then decided to redevelop the site themselves on foot of a fresh planning permission. The new scheme, designed by Burke-Kennedy Doyle, would provide a total of eight office blocks, two apartment buildings and a 180-bedroom Sheraton hotel. But here again, the malaise in the marketplace dictated that progress would be piecemeal, and the prospect was that much of the site would remain in use as a surface car park for some time to come.

Meanwile, the Slazengers had every reason to rue the day Gallagher presented himself as the saviour of their Stephen's Green site. In 1974, they had suffered the loss of Powerscourt House in a raging inferno and now all the painstaking effort they had put into making a packet in the city centre was about to go up in smoke. Their bankers were even more distraught. Having invested so heavily in this demented enterprise, they were left with no option but to put the site up for sale in the vain hope of getting their money back. As the heartbroken Slazengers headed off to retirement in the Isle of Man, the banks sought a buyer for their derelict scrubland on the Green. They needed to get more than £8 million to recoup all the loans advanced over the years but, at this high price, there was a noticeable lack of takers. With the Slazenger companies in receivership and interest bills rolling up on a daily basis, the banks were desperate to extricate themselves from what was clearly a no-win situation. Their predicament was well known and this brought the bargain-hunters out in force. John Byrne was among those who dropped in to see the agents, Jones Lang Wooton, and after examining the site map as if it was a beast at a country fair, he made them an offer. 'I'll give ye a million an acre for it', said the Kerry-born developer. Given that this would have worked out at £4 million, less than half of what JLW's clients wanted, they politely demurred. But if the banks thought they were going to do much better, they were dead wrong. In January 1984, almost two years after Gallagher's collapse, the site was sold off at the rock-bottom price of £5 million – just half of what he had agreed to pay for it and only a third of the figure being mentioned in his talks with Irish Life.

The purchasers were Power Securities, in a consortium with British Land, and they lost no time in drawing up plans for a vast development incorporating over seven acres of shopping space, bars and restaurants as well as forty luxury flats overlooking St Stephen's Green and a multi-storey car park catering for eight hundred cars. The Green frontage was to be mainly glass with a conservatory roof, New Orleans-style decorative steel balconies and traditional timber shop-fronts and, all in all, this 'fun' scheme with its minimal provision for offices was warmly welcomed by the conservation groups. This was not unusual. Unlike other developers who found themselves embroiled in planning controversy, Power Securities always managed to win a conservationist seal of approval for its projects. Indeed, it seemed as if Robin Power, the Cork-born dentist-turned-developer, could do no wrong. In large measure, his reputation was based on the imaginative conversion of Powerscourt Town House and its

outbuildings into the city's smartest shopping centre. This scheme, perhaps more than any other, received widespread public acclaim, not least because it gave grounds for hope that the redevelopment of Dublin need not depend on destruction. Power was, of course, also responsible for similarly sensitive schemes in his native Cork, but it was often forgotten that he had launched his property career on a very smart piece of speculation. Apparently acting on a tip off, he bought the Marino Point estate in Cork Harbour for £60,000 and sold it some months later for more than six times that figure to Nitrigin Eireann, who built their white elephant fertiliser plant on the site.

Power's angelic reputation also allowed him to get away with the odd bit of devilment on the side. Thus, when he proposed gutting three listed Georgian houses beside University Church on St Stephen's Green, shoving a four-storey office block into the back gardens, none of the conservation groups objected. Yet they had all subscribed to the *Urbana* report, which called on the Corporation to take a firm line against this type of intensive development. And when Power proposed to build a Georgian pastiche office block at the strategically-critical junction of Fitzwilliam Place and Lower Leeson Street, his plans were enthusiastically endorsed by An Taisce, the Georgian Society and the Dublin Civic Group. In their innocence, they didn't realise the new block would be 60 per cent larger than a controversial scheme sanctioned by Bord Pleanala in 1979. Previously, the site had been occupied by an attractive walled garden adjoining No. 25 Fitzwilliam Place, the last house on the famous 'Georgian Mile' stretching from Merrion Square to Leeson Street. In 1977, the Corporation firmly rejected plans for a modern office block on the grounds that such an 'incongruous' development would 'do violence to the established character of the area'. Two years later, in a decision that shocked conservationists, Bord Pleanala overruled the Corporation and granted permission for this blatantly speculative scheme. Within months, the successful applicant, solicitor Eunan McCarron – whose law firm, Overend McCarron and Gibbons, acted as legal advisers to the board – had made a large profit by selling out to Power Securities.

Robin Power knew a thing or two about how to mollify the conservation lobby and so did his executive director, Frank Benson, a former Corporation planner who went on to become chairman of Bord Pleanala. Their revised plans were for an office block that would be dressed up to look like a Georgian *palazzo*. Corporation planners, like the conservation groups, had a weakness for pastiche and it was positively encouraged as an alternative to discredited 'modern' architecture. The widespread application of this cop-out solution elsewhere in the city had already produced its share of travesties. Near the top of Dawson Street, for example, the planners permitted a fake Georgian office block to be built in the middle of an essentially *Victorian* terrace. Meanwhile, at the other end of the same street, they tried to make a hash of the Life Association of Ireland headquarters, one of the few really good modern buildings in Dublin, by insisting on the omission of its oriel windows and ground-floor glass conservatory. Worse still, they allowed the Irish Civil Service Building Society to execute an architectural abortion on D'Olier Street, ruining forever the only uniform street elevation to survive intact from the days of the Wide Streets Commissioners. The new building replaced the Regent Hotel and it was supposed to be a 'reproduction of the existing facade design', but every single feature – window levels, glazing patterns, simulated stone surrounds, even the ground-floor granite – is totally at variance with the original Georgian buildings in the same terrace. This didn't seem to worry the architects, Higginbotham and Stafford, for they compounded all of their errors by plonking an enormous bungalow-like superstructure on the roof, clearly visible from far up O'Connell Street. And their clients thumbed their noses at the Corporation by refusing to remove an unauthorised sky-sign which defaces the splendid Gothic-style building at the apex of D'Olier and Westmoreland streets.

The 'Georgian' facade of the office block at Fitzwilliam Place, however, cloaked a much more determined act of defiance. Robin Power's planning permission, granted in March 1980, specified that the development would contain nine residential units. There were to be two penthouse flats on the roof of the new block, two flats in a reconstructed

mews building around the corner and five more flats in the adjoining house, No. 25 Fitzwilliam Place. Power was living up to his reputation as an imaginative developer: the residential content of the scheme was to be an impressive 29 per cent. In fact, however, this modest contribution to the life of the city never materialised. On completion in mid-1982, the entire block was taken over as a new headquarters by Power's bankers, the Investment Bank of Ireland, and they promptly dispensed with the residential content of the development. The two penthouse flats were fitted out as an executive diningroom, the mews became a showpiece pad for visiting clients and nothing whatever was done to convert No. 25 Fitzwilliam Place into five flats. In December 1984, after more than two years in flagrant breach of the Planning Act, the bank slipped in an application seeking permission to convert the house into offices. Incredibly, they got it.

The extreme reluctance of institutional developers to build flats as an integral part of their office schemes was brought sharply into focus by Irish Life's incredible plans for George's Quay. There, on a four-acre site opposite the Custom House, Michael Lucey sought permission for a monstrously disproportionate development containing almost 500,000 square feet of offices and *eight* miserable flats. And when the planners raised their collective eyebrows at the low residential content, less than 1 per cent of the entire scheme, Irish Life bought them off by offering to contribute £500,000 towards the Corporation's inner city housing programme – enough, perhaps, to build a dozen new houses. At the same time, the state-owned insurance company was deserting its own long-standing tenants, many of them old or infirm, by selling off several apartment blocks to private speculators. Yet Michael Lucey, the force behind Irish Life's hard-nosed approach to the property business, is concerned about attacks on family life. Outside office hours, he serves as chairman of Family Solidarity, a right-wing Catholic pressure group organised to defend the family and its place in Irish society.

PETER THURSFIELD

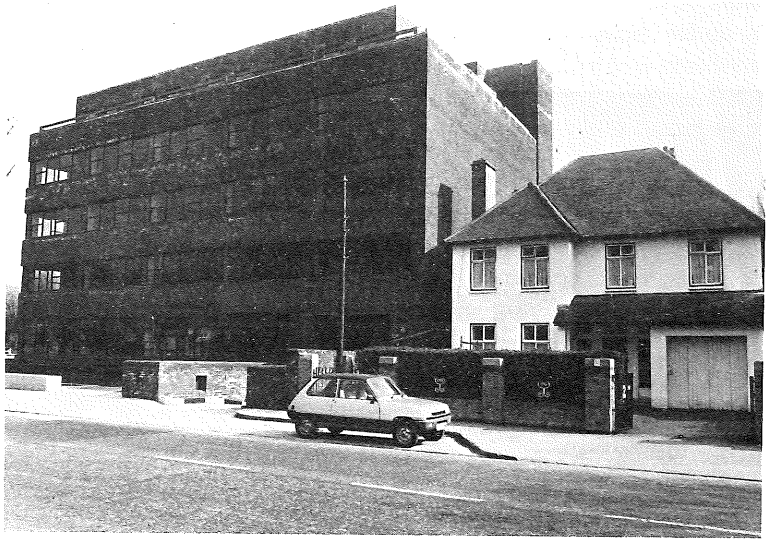
'Brutalism gone mad': the Central Bank, as seen from Cecilia Street, with CIE-owned derelict sites in the foreground.

PETER THURSFIELD

The EBS headquarters in Westmoreland Street. The preserved art nouveau façade of the old Paradiso restaurant, flanked by the unauthorised mirror-glass curtain-wall (*on right*) and the second phase incorporating 'solid elements' insisted on by Corporation planners.

IRISH TIMES

The Costa Brava comes to Dublin Castle: the OPW-designed office block for the Revenue Commissioners, with the Chapel Royal alongside and, in the foreground, some civil service detritus.



IRISH TIMES

Next-door neighbours in Eglinton Road: the five-storey office block approved by Jimmy Tully is just a couple of feet from the adjoining house.

IRISH TIMES

Some of the architecture students who occupied the five Georgian houses in Pembroke Street which Bord na Mona had planned to pull down.

IRISH TIMES

Sam Stephenson, striking a characteristic pose, outside the Bord na Mona headquarters in Baggot Street after the building won a major award from An Taisce in 1984.

IRISH TIMES

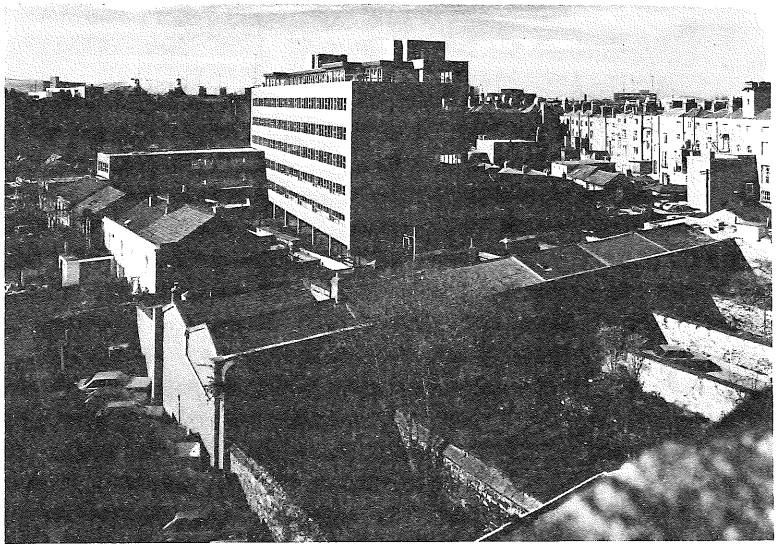
Gallagher Group workers picketing the site of Molesworth Hall and St Ann's Schools in protest against an occupation by architecture students seeking to preserve the surviving Deane and Woodward building. (*Inset:* Patrick Gallagher.)

PETER THURSFIELD

The re-making of Molesworth Street. The Sun Alliance block (*left*) and the Gallagher Group block, built on the site of Molesworth Hall and St Ann's Schools.

IRISH TIMES

Nos 10 and 11 Harcourt Terrace, focus of a nine-year planning battle.



IRISH ARCHITECTURAL ARCHIVE

Ghastly intrusion: the seven-storey office block in Leeson Close, shovelled in among the mews houses behind Fitzwilliam Place.

IRISH TIMES

Frescati House, Blackrock, in 1970 and (*below*) what remained of it eleven years later, with Roches Stores in the background.

KEVIN McMAHON

PETER THURSFIELD

Streetscape on the Green, 1985. What Dublin Corporation and the developers did to one corner (*above*). The widened version of Cuffe Street, complete with derelict sites, framed by Russell Court (*left*) and the Ardilaun Centre. The group of buildings at the corner of St Stephen's Green and South King Street (*below*) was all that survived twenty years of ruthless speculation on the four-acre Slazenger site.

PETER THURSFIELD

PETER THURSFIELD

Bunkers at Wood Quay: the first stage of Dublin Corporation's Civic Offices, with Christchurch Cathedral in the background.

IRISH TIMES

Frank Feely, the man who 'bestrides the city like a colossus'.

PETER THURSFIELD

Dublin Corporation's idea of a street. The High Street/Cornmarket dual-carriageway, seen from the 'corner' of Upper Bridge Street.

Fourteen

'These riverside buildings are the essential Dublin. Individually unremarkable as works of architecture, collectively they are superb and form a perfect foil to the special buildings, such as the Four Courts and the Custom House. If they are allowed to disintegrate, to be replaced by unsympathetic new buildings, the most memorable aspect of the city will be lost.'

Tall, craggy, lean and bushy-browed, Frank Feely 'bestrides the city like a colossus', as one Sunday newspaper put it. In reality, however, the City Manager is more of a career bureaucrat than a colossus. Like the vast bulk of Dublin Corporation's senior staff, he has never worked anywhere else. The son of a Leitrim Garda, he started out in 1949 as an eighteen-year-old clerk and ended up behind the City Manager's desk thirty years later. As the man charged with the awesome responsibility of running Dublin, Feely was naturally defensive about the Corporation's role. He was sick and tired of the media focussing its attention on how the city had become a wasteland. All this talk about derelict sites and decaying buildings had induced a certain despondency among the citizens, and Feely wanted to do something to lift their spirits. So he coined the catchy, if not terribly original, slogan 'I Love Dublin' and had it emblazoned on all Corporation vehicles, even the refuse lorries. Show some emotion, Feely seemed to be saying, let them know that City Hall *cares*.

Yet no amount of officially-sponsored sloganeering – or, indeed, annual street carnivals, no matter how successful – would cover up the shameful fact that Dublin Corporation itself has wreaked more destruction on the city than any combination of profit-motivated vandals. Through its own plans and policies, the Corporation has been feeding like a vampire

off the urban fabric for longer than anyone can remember. And the most insidious feature of this deadly activity is that most people are unaware of the whys and wherefores of what is being done in their name. All they see are the frightening results – hundreds of buildings wantonly demolished and hundreds more marked down for the same fate, historic streets reduced to ruin, whole areas transformed into bleak twilight zones. And for what? So that the Corporation and its road engineers can remake the city to cater for cars.

Wood Quay became the most potent symbol of the Corporation's determination to have its way with the city, regardless of the cost or the consequences. The bureaucrats wanted new civic offices and they were prepared to stop at nothing to achieve their objective. It didn't matter to them that the office blocks were to be built on the most important Viking site ever unearthed in Ireland containing, as it did, the very story of Dublin's birth and early development. With the connivance of the National Museum authorities, they brought in bulldozers to remove much of the archaeological evidence and only grudgingly consented to an incomplete excavation of what was left. Prominent conservationists pleaded with them not to enter a construction contract for the offices, but they ignored this earnest plea and went ahead anyway. They spurned appeals to cease and desist from over eighty social and cultural organisations, including the Council of Europe, and contemptuously cast aside a petition signed by more than 200,000 people. They shut their eyes to mass meetings in the Mansion House and protest marches through the city. And when the High Court declared the site to be a National Monument, they conspired with the Commissioners of Public Works to subvert this judgment by drawing up an order for the monument's destruction. Then, after Dubliners had elected a new City Council pledged to defend Wood Quay, the petty officials warned the people's representatives that they would all be personally surcharged if they welshed on the civic offices project. And with the Fianna Fáil government remaining stone-deaf to demands that it should foot the bill, the councillors caved in and the officials got their way. All in all, as Ulick O'Connor has said, this bureaucratic triumph over a clearly-expressed democratic consensus, was

'the most terrifying event in this country over the past twenty years'.

In the wake of the longest and most intense environmental controversy in Dublin's history, the Corporation has nothing to show for it but two great block-houses, which have been likened to huge filing cabinets or over-sized nuclear shelters or even to the concrete bunkers built by the Germans around the coast of continental Europe during World War II. 'It's a real *Guns of Navarone* job', one taxi driver laconically observed. 'All that's missing are the big guns in the slits.' The architect, Sam Stephenson, whose passion for mega-structures is well known, has said his civic offices are supposed to be 'making a statement'. But what is the nature of this 'statement'? Certainly, the design does not suggest that these buildings are to be the hub of local government in Dublin. Stark, cold and monstrous, they convey a totalitarian image, which is not too surprising given Stephenson's undisguised admiration for the work of Hitler's architect, Albert Speer. And their very totalitarianism is almost tailor-made for Dublin Corporation, whose officials will now be able to insulate themselves against the city they seem to despise so much.

The high price ordinary citizens have been forced to pay for these so-called civic offices was not merely environmental. It could be measured in pounds and pence: *their* pounds and pence. At £20 million-plus, the two granite-faced blocks are the most expensive buildings ever built in Dublin – and this enormous outlay covered only the first stage of a much larger project. Still to come are two more office blocks as well as goodies like the sunken council chamber, terraced park and underground Viking museum. However, the cost of the first two blocks has spiralled out of control, jeopardising the rest of the scheme. Incredibly, it works out at triple the contract price quoted by Messrs John Paul in October 1977 and *ten times* the original estimate for the entire complex when it was first conceived in 1967. And while the Corporation would dearly love to blame obstreperous archaeologists for this wild cost over-run, the truth is that they only held up the project for two years. Even after they had been cleared off the site in 1980, work on the two blocks took another

five years to complete, twice as long as anyone had anticipated. To put the £20 million price tag in perspective, it averages out at £150 per square foot – three times the usual cost of office space – or about £23,000 for each of the 870 staff who will occupy the buildings. This has so unnerved the Corporation that it has been unable to bring itself to make a decision on when, if ever, the second stage will be built. Indeed, there are disturbing indications that this has been indefinitely postponed, perhaps for decades. Cut-off floors at the lower levels of the completed buildings have been screened with 'temporary' pre-fabricated panelling and the remainder of the site was set to be covered with tarmacadam for use as a staff car park.

Looking at the architectural mess on Wood Quay today, it's hard to credit that this is the end-product of thirty years of planning. For it was in January 1956 that the City Council first approved plans for civic offices on the four-acre site in front of Christchurch Cathedral. The scheme, designed by Jones and Kelly, was straightforwardly Stalinist in style and its great bulk would have blotted out *any* view of Christchurch from the Liffey quays – an issue that was to loom large in the subsequent saga. Even the RIAI expressed strong reservations about the design, arguing that the site was of such importance that it warranted a major architectural competition. Under pressure, the Corporation quietly shelved Jones and Kelly's scheme, though it never abandoned the cherished notion of building its offices at Wood Quay. Special legislation was enacted to enable the site to be acquired under a compulsory purchase order and, by 1967, the Corporation had laid its hands on all the property it needed for the project. Demolition work got under way almost immediately and among the casualties was O'Meara's Irish House pub, an eccentric piece of Victoriana at the corner of Winetavern Street, with its Celtic revival round towers and patriotic murals.

Then, instead of adopting the RIAI's proposal for an architectural competition, the Corporation proceeded to arrange a contest for *developers*. The idea was that the winner would build the offices and lease them to the Corporation for ninety-nine years, after which they would become the city's property.

Thus, from the very outset, the Corporation was primarily concerned about how the whole project was to be financed. Architecture was very much a secondary issue and, significantly, there was no reference whatever to the site having any archaeological importance. The four-page brief for the contest, which makes ironic reading today, merely called for the provision of 300,000 square feet of office space in 'an efficient layout and a form reflecting the importance of the buildings in the life of the city'. Noting that it was the Corporation's policy to 'open up the vista of Christchurch from the quays', the brief said 'the disposition and height of the buildings must take this into account'. But there were to be no 'unduly windswept' open spaces or large-scale surface car parking. It also specified that the designs should 'have regard to' the character of existing buildings on the riverfront and 'the effect on the skyline of the proposed buildings, particularly when viewed from the quays'. Otherwise, the brief concentrated on so-called 'road improvements' which would have had the effect of turning Christchurch into a glorified traffic island, surrounded on all sides by unnecessarily wide streets.

What followed was a complete farce. The Corporation picked out six of the entries submitted by developers and put models of their schemes on exhibition at City Hall in November 1968. 'We have been invited to share in the blame either for what is chosen or for not caring enough to get involved', said one architect, the anonymous author of a two-page feature on the 'exhibition' in the *Irish Times*. The RIAI scolded the Corporation for placing the models on display without any drawings or other information, and the institute was even more incensed when it became apparent that the Corporation intended to judge the competition itself. Only after sustained pressure from the RIAI was a twelve-man board of assessors appointed to adjudicate on the proposals put forward by the short-listed developers and their architects.

The most succinct assessment of the schemes on view at City Hall was made by Desmond Leslie. Referring to the requirement in the brief that the entrants must 'have regard to' Christchurch, he wrote, 'The best that can be said for any of them is that the cathedral *is still there* – a tiny parish

church isolated in a wilderness of Lego toy building bricks'. Worst of all was the scheme submitted by Desmond FitzGerald on behalf of the Gallagher Group. Showing extraordinary indecision for a professor of architecture he produced four different designs and needed to hire a van to transport his clatter of models to the 'exhibition'. They were all variations on the theme of a massive eighteen-storey slab block, plonked on the eastern side of the site, allowing a full-frontal view of Christchurch over a bleak, windswept *piazza*. It was, said the *Irish Times*, 'a banal imitation of the type of building which has so despoiled so much of England since the war . . . Its total lack of regard for its location (you could put it anywhere with equal result) is so close to the Corporation's indifference that one fears the worst, which this certainly would be.'

More daring was the design submitted by Michael Scott and Partners on behalf of Crampton's. A scaled-down version of the United Nations in New York, it had a 22-storey skyscraper, with a two-storey council chamber alongside, rising from a podium that would have covered the entire site. This startling scheme was placed second and might even have won the competition but for fears among the assessors that it would dominate Christchurch and create a dangerous precedent for the low-rise character of central Dublin. Thus, after spending the whole of 1969 deliberating on the matter, the twelve wise men decided in favour of Sam Stephenson's ingenious plan for four office blocks, ranging in height from five to ten storeys and offering glimpses of the cathedral through the gaps in between. 'The project is one of the most challenging ever presented to an architect in Ireland', *Build* magazine commented. 'Its treatment needs the attention of somebody who is sensitive to our heritage and our classical buildings.' Stephenson readily accepted the challenge but, as his handling of the project would show, he hadn't an ounce of the sensitivity it so clearly demanded.

The Corporation then indulged in the charade of getting Stephenson and his clients, the Green Property Company, to apply for planning permission for the project. But even this produced another bizarre twist in the never-ending saga of Wood Quay. Following normal practice, Stephenson's plans

were sent round-robin to the far-flung Corporation departments and, for a variety of technical reasons, at least two of them actually recommended that the whole scheme should be rejected. As City Manager, Matt Macken had the final decision. He wasn't going to stand idly by, allowing the Corporation to become the laughing stock of Europe for refusing permission for its own offices. And so, on Christmas Eve 1970, in a surreptitious move clearly designed to thwart third-party objectors, he decided to grant approval for the project. It didn't work. More than thirty individuals and organisations, including the National Monuments Advisory Council, had lodged objections and many of them joined in an appeal to the then Minister, Bobby Molloy. A full-scale oral hearing was held in May 1971 and, after an extraordinarily long hiatus, Molloy finally confirmed Macken's decision in July 1972. There were fifteen detailed conditions as well as a highly-significant covering letter from the Minister's office requesting 'that all reasonable opportunities and facilities shall be afforded to the National Monuments Advisory Council to inspect, record and recover matter of archaeological interest' from the Wood Quay site.

However, by the time Molloy's decision came through, the Green Property Company – bruised by the Hume Street controversy – had pulled out of any involvement in the civic offices project. Undeterred, the Corporation resolved to go ahead on its own and, in September 1972, the Investment Bank of Ireland agreed to provide a £5 million loan package to cover what was then estimated as the cost of the entire scheme. A ludicrously-optimistic Matt Macken assured city councillors that the burden of servicing this loan would be met by selling off Corporation property vacated by officials moving to the new offices. As a result, the scheme would be completed 'at very little cost' to the ratepayers. 'It is clear, therefore, that there is no reason why we should not proceed immediately to erect the civic offices', Macken confidently declared in March 1973.

But the Corporation's plans would soon come unstuck. Since 1969, the National Museum had been conducting a desultory dig at Wood Quay, unearthing the evidence of Dublin's buried Viking heritage. In May 1973, with only 5

per cent of the site investigated, the Corporation issued a notice to quit and the museum authorities, in a disgraceful betrayal of their cultural duty, meekly complied with this summary eviction order. For three months, bulldozers were let rip through the site, destroying much of the archaeological remains – including a lately-discovered section of the old city wall. In the ensuing controversy, Noel Carroll, the Corporation's athletic public relations officer, would categorically deny that it was, in fact, the city wall. (Among Carroll's string of silly statements about Wood Quay was his memorable assurance that the civic offices would 'enhance' the view of Christchurch Cathedral.) Even Jimmy Tully became convinced that things had been allowed to get out of hand. On 13 November 1973, he issued this terse statement: 'The government has decided that development of the Winetavern Street site for the municipal offices of Dublin Corporation should cease, pending consultation and further investigation.' The Corporation was shattered. 'There's a jinx on this civic offices project', one official commented. 'It's beginning to look as though it will never be built.'

The newspapers were deluged with letters applauding Tully's decision to halt the scheme. Most people shared his apparent conviction that the offices should be built elsewhere, leaving the site to be developed as an 'archaeological park' with an uninterrupted view of Christchurch from the quays. However, this popular pipe-dream took no account of the fact that Wood Quay was a steeply-sloping and exposed north-facing site, which made it entirely unsuitable for use as a park of any kind. Neither was Christchurch designed as a monument to be seen in isolation. A medieval cathedral, albeit dressed up in Victorian finery, it was always meant to be surrounded by buildings. The real question was what *form* these buildings should take. But with public attention so firmly focused on the archaeological aspects of Wood Quay, this issue was hardly addressed at all until it was too late.

Behind the scenes, Matt Macken and his senior officials were working flat out to save the Corporation's bacon. 'The level of activity was something terrible', said project manager Pat Russell. 'None of us had ever worked so hard.' They had been told by Tully to prepare a report setting out the avail-

able options – including the feasibility of building the civic offices on a large Corporation-owned site at Waterford Street, off Marlborough Street. The report was produced in double-quick time, just three weeks after the Minister's dramatic intervention. By any standard, this report should have contained a calm and dispassionate assessment of the alternatives. It did not. The Waterford Street option was brushed aside in two short paragraphs wringing with bureaucratic cold water. It would mean starting from scratch with a completely new scheme, the officials warned, and this would involve a delay of two years and, horror of horrors, an extra cost exceeding £2.5 million. By contrast, six times as much space in the report was given over to arguments clearly designed to win the support of city councillors for a policy of standing fast at Wood Quay. Macken and his officials were effusively rosy about the prospects. There would be no problem about incorporating the archaeological finds, even the unearthed city wall, in the new buildings. And if Tully wanted a 'clear and unobstructed view' of Christchurch from the quays, this could be achieved by the simple expedient of relocating the four office blocks in a group on the eastern side of the site, leaving a 'suitably-sized amenity area' in front of the cathedral.

Not surprisingly, when presented with all of this one-sided advice, the ever-credulous City Council voted *unanimously* in favour of a motion calling on the Minister to allow the civic offices to be built at Wood Quay. Corporation staff, fearful that they might never see their new offices, had also been applying strong pressure through their unions to get Tully to reverse his 'high-handed' decision. But what really clinched it was Macken's argument that any further delay would cost money. Thus, on 13 February 1974, Tully announced that the government had reconsidered its earlier decision and now felt that the Wood Quay scheme could go ahead, with the four office blocks moved over to the Fishamble Street side of the site. It was apparent from this extraordinary U-turn that the government had been hoodwinked just as easily as the City Council. But the alleged compromise did not fool conservationists. Describing it as 'the worst possible solution', An Taisce said the buildings 'will never be a success and it is

our opinion that they will clash with Christchurch Cathedral in a very incongruous manner'. Who, indeed, could argue with that statement today?

By far the most imaginative, intriguing and sensible solution was put forward by the British *Architectural Review*, in its special supplement on Dublin in November 1974. 'Instead of the civic offices consisting of four square blocks, the vertical bulk of which will inevitably diminish or obscure Christchurch Cathedral from every river view, they should take the form of lower buildings around a series of courtyards stepping up the hill. . . . On the riverside, the existing character of solid terraces would be echoed, with shops at ground level and alleyways penetrating the facade to reach the various courtyards'. This radical alternative, copiously illustrated with drawings and sketches, was very much in line with the *Review*'s evocative vision of the Liffey and its townscape. 'Without question, it is the quays which give topographical coherence to Dublin. They are the frontispiece to the city and the nation: grand, yet human in scale, varied yet orderly, they present a picture of a satisfactory city community. It is as if two ranks of people were lined up, mildly varying in their gifts, appearance and fortunes, but happily agreed on basic values. . . . These riverside buildings are the essential Dublin. Individually unremarkable as works of architecture, collectively they are superb and form a perfect foil to the special buildings, such as the Four Courts and the Custom House. If they are allowed to disintegrate, to be replaced by unsympathetic new buildings, the most memorable aspect of the city will be lost.'

The new design for the civic offices proposed by the *Review* mirrored a sea-change in architectural thinking at the time, a move away from the brutalism of the 1960s and towards a more sympathetic, conservation-minded approach. But if Sam Stephenson was aware of this strong current, he would have been the last architect in the world to be swept away by it. Stephenson had been intensely involved in the Corporation's efforts to save the Wood Quay scheme and the delay caused by Tully's intervention, as well as resumed archaeological excavations on the site, gave him a glorious opportunity to redesign the whole scheme. However, the more he worked

at it, the more unsympathetic it became. The four blocks in his competition-winning entry had pre-cast elevations, flat roofs and projecting windows. By the time he was finished redesigning them in May 1976, the blocks had become almost solid, with chamfered roofs, granite cladding and – worst of all – deep-recessed slit windows. In other words, the entire appearance of the civic offices is totally different to the scheme envisaged in 1968. A private developer making such radical changes would have to get planning permission, but this requirement does not apply to the Corporation. As a planning authority, it is exempt from development control. Even so, Stephenson had to 'sell' his monstrous package to the Corporation's senior officials and, incredibly, they agreed to his new proposals. But then, he had a way with clients, as he revealed to the *Sunday Tribune* in January 1985: 'You have to develop a whole lot of skills you never thought you'd have to develop: of deceit and concealing from people your real intentions half the time, so that you manoeuvre things through and get it done with the minimum damage to the integrity of the scheme as you might have conceived it. You've got to develop a hard neck and an iron determination to actually get something through and to devise methods by which you can get it done.'

In the case of Wood Quay, Stephenson was obviously well able to mesmerise the Corporation and its officials. But even they couldn't be cajoled into going ahead with the whole scheme all at once. In the hyper-inflationary atmosphere of the mid-1970s, the sheer cost had become somewhat intimidating. Thus, in a vain effort to save money by putting off the evil day, the project was split into two stages and a £6.7 million contract for the first stage was signed in October 1977. Fatuously, Noel Carroll predicted that Corporation staff would 'certainly' be moving into the new building in two years time – in other words, by early 1980! However, this utopian target could only have been achieved by abrogating Matt Macken's solemn assurance to the City Council, in October 1974, that 'every spoonful of soil on the site' would be excavated by the National Museum. The Corporation dishonoured this pledge. Just six weeks after the contractors moved in, word leaked out that they had instructions

to bulldoze untouched Viking earthen defences, more than a thousand years old. For the Corporation – in the words of its counsel, Hugh O'Flaherty SC – these unique remnants of the city's past were little more than 'medieval junk'.

This was more than F. X. Martin could take. An ebullient Augustinian priest and professor of medieval history at UCD, he was chairman of the Friends of Medieval Dublin, a group formed in April 1976 to foster public interest in the city's Viking and early-Norman heritage. The founder members included archaeologists, historians, geographers, planners and architects – among them, of all people, Sam Stephenson himself. Stung by their 'obsession' about Wood Quay, he had slipped away long before Father Martin became the spikiest thorn in the Corporation's side. The jolly friar hog-tied the bureaucrats with High Court injunctions and, in the most celebrated case in Dublin's conservation annals, he persuaded Judge Liam Hamilton to declare much of the site a National Monument. Before delivering his verdict, the learned judge toured the excavations and was even pictured, stepping among the wattle paths, on the front page of the *Irish Times*. 'It must have been the only time in legal history that a judge was photographed at the scene of the crime', Stephenson commented later.

Wood Quay had caught the public imagination and Father Martin soon found himself at the head of a mass movement. He was a most unlikely hero. Dressed in his clerical garb and professional robes, he led some 20,000 people of all creeds and classes through the streets of the city one memorable sunny Saturday in September 1978. Wood Quay was the issue but, in many ways, those who took part in the great Viking march were also protesting against the relentless destruction of Dublin. It was a cry from the heart, a huge outpouring of conservation fervour, and among the many who witnessed it was Sam Stephenson. 'I was in my car coming round by Trinity when a guard moved out and stopped me', he recalled. 'I didn't know why. Then, all of a sudden, this avalanche of people came down the street with banners and placards about Wood Quay. I pulled down my sun visor in case anyone would recognise me and say "There's that so-and-so who's destroying our heritage". Fortunately, nobody did.'

Stephenson viewed the controversy with a mixture of bemusement and contempt. 'The evening papers found the whole thing irresistible and there were scare headlines every other day about this or that artifact being destroyed. People were given the impression that there was a Viking village there, with a whole lot of fossilised Vikings drinking out of horns. What happened was that a lot of people in positions of authority didn't say "No" early enough. Instead, they either washed their hands of it or else they jumped on the bandwagon. I had the feeling that they all wanted someone to tell them, "This is the end, it's all over", which is what the Supreme Court finally did.' According to him, the group of prominent citizens who occupied the site in June 1979 were just 'publicity-seekers', and he was appalled to find that his fellow-architect, Michael Scott, was among them. 'Perhaps he forgot that his own firm came second in the civic offices competition back in 1968.'

For three short weeks, the Black Raven flag of the Vikings fluttered over the Wood Quay site but, in the end, the battle was won by the bureaucrats and their bulldozers. Even the surviving section of the old city wall, which the Corporation had pledged to retain *in situ*, was dismantled, its ancient stones numbered for re-erection at some distant date in the future. And far from showing magnanimity in victory, the Corporation vindictively pursued Father Martin through the courts for £89,000 in 'damages' – a piddling sum set against the vast public expenditure on this most unworthy of ventures. The row over Wood Quay also had reverberations for Stephenson. Dogged by controversy at every turn, he became something of a pariah in the property world, shunned by developers who wanted things done with the minimum of fuss. More and more, he turned to London, hustling for clients in the more congenial climate of Thatcher's Britain and sending home the work to be processed by his slimmed-down staff in Bride Street. Whenever he was asked about the dreadful mess at Wood Quay, he would plead for judgment to be suspended until the entire scheme is completed. Two more blocks and a landscaped park stepping down the hill from Christchurch would make all the difference in the world, he would assure anyone who was prepared to listen. But his

whole architectural concept, even the idea of centralised municipal offices, seemed curiously out-dated, a throwback to the demented days of 'comprehensive redevelopment'. Looking at the two cliff-faced blockhouses on the site and the grim prospect that the civic offices may *never* be completed in any form, few could blame the valiant Wood Quay campaigners for saying, 'We told you so.'

The Vikings, who knew a thing or two about how to build cities – and how to destroy them – would be horrified by the shambles we have made of their settlement on the Liffey. The old medieval city is in ruins. Only a few sad remnants of the wall are still standing and from Wood Quay to St Patrick's Cathedral, from Bridge Street to Dublin Castle, every street, lane and alleyway is scarred by the most appalling dereliction. And most of the damage has been done over the past thirty years by the Corporation and its devastating road plans. Scores of buildings have been demolished and dozens more are due to be knocked down to facilitate the grand design of the road engineers. High Street, once the main street of the old city, has already been transformed into an eighty-foot-wide dual-carriageway flanked by derelict sites, and so few buildings were left that the street sign had to be hung on a solitary steel pole. And when Lower Bridge Street was widened in 1983, the Corporation swept away the covered alley leading to Dublin's oldest tavern, the Brazen Head, leaving it with a 'temporary' entrance strewn with rubble and fronted by a pallisade fence. Nothing is *ever* rebuilt. Left-over sites are allowed to become major eyesores, cumulatively destroying any sense of enclosure on the newly-widened roads. For the want of something better to do, the Corporation laid out a little park beside St Audoen's, at the 'corner' of High Street and Bridge Street. But this windswept 'amenity' merely reinforces the blown-out landscape of the area and, underlining the Corporation contempt for streets, its Gothic-style gateways are built not of brick but street-setts!

No doubt a similar fate is in store for Christchurch Place, where the road engineers want to get rid of the remaining buildings opposite the cathedral so that this already-generous carriageway can be widened by ten feet. Almost twenty years ago, a large site at the Nicholas Street end was acquired by

Dermot Ryan, the erstwhile hotel tycoon, Fianna Fáil supporter and part-time poet. He had plans for an office and shopping development there, but the Corporation refused permission because it wanted the whole site for a car park. Later, the old buildings were replaced by a corrugated hoarding, steel gates and pre-fabricated huts to prepare the site for use as a compound for towed-away cars. It's a fine greeting for foreign visitors on the well-trodden tourist trail between Christchurch and St Patrick's. But there's much more for them to see. After passing the blocked-up ruins of St Nicholas Within, they are quickly introduced to a veritable potpourri of dereliction on the west side of Patrick Street. The ingredients include a scrapyard lurking behind another corrugated hoarding, followed by a vacant site used for surface car parking, then a terrace that looks as if it might collapse at any moment, followed by half-demolished buildings ringed with barbed wire and finally, right opposite St Patrick's, yet another stretch of corrugated sheeting in front of a Corporation refuse 'depot'. In the midst of all this squalor stands the Glen Abbey factory, a three-storey building set back some twenty feet from the line of the existing street. It was built like that to take account of a Corporation road-widening plan – *in 1954.*

More than thirty years later, in May 1985, there was a public inquiry at City Hall into the Corporation's plans to drive a six-lane dual-carriageway through Patrick Street, New Street and Lower Clanbrassil Street. Altogether, no less than one hundred and forty properties were to be swept away to clear a path for this highway which the road engineers claimed, quite ludicrously, would turn out something like Lower Baggot Street. But the Corporation's 'plans' for redevelopment along the new road frontage were little more than fantasy and, in this regard, the RIAI warned that the street facade of the dual-carriageway would include 'shorn buildings, newly-exposed party walls and garden walls and a jagged street line behind a no man's land'. Incredibly however, the road engineers produced not a single shred of evidence to justify their outrageous proposals. Their own figures, far from supporting the scheme, showed that traffic volumes on Patrick Street had actually *fallen* during the previous twelve years. The most memorable phrase of the inquiry was

uttered by Maurice McMonagle, the white-haired Enniskillen-born engineer who presented the Corporation's 'case'. When it was put to him that 80 per cent of inner city residents did not own cars and, therefore, did not want to be living cheek-by-jowl with major roads, he said, 'Please God, some day, they'll all have cars if they wish.'

Taking a back seat at the seven-day inquiry was McMonagle's boss, chief city and county roads engineer Brendan Murphy. Though his presence wasn't required, he was there every day, listening attentively to the evidence like an expectant father in the waiting-room of a maternity hospital. For the road plans were very much Brendan Murphy's brain-children. Donegal-born, he joined the Corporation's engineering department in 1942 and, over the years, he became the most forceful exponent of its car-oriented perspective on the city. Murphy's single-mindedness was not too surprising, given his training and work experience; but it was reinforced at a practical level by the fact that he himself was a car commuter, travelling into the city from the nether reaches of Churchtown. Another Donegalman, chief medical officer Brendan O'Donnell, who said it would be perfectly alright to build Corporation houses fronting onto the proposed dual-carriageway, lives in Naas, Co. Kildare, and drives to work every day. The chief planning officer, Gay McCarron, who gave his imprimatur to the road scheme, lives in Dundrum and he, too, commutes by car to his office in the Irish Life Centre. And so it goes on, right up to Frank Feely, who lives in Templeogue and drives to City Hall each morning – coincidentally, passing right along the route of the proposed New Street/Patrick Street dual-carriageway. For most of the Corporation's senior staff, the city is a sort of colony which they drive into to administer five days a week.

The Corporation's scorched earth policy for the old city also encompasses the widening of Fishamble Street, Francis Street and Parliament Street as well as a new road linking High Street with Winetavern Street. Yet, incredibly, the same City Development Plan which lists all of these road schemes also contains this statement: 'In the medieval town, it shall be policy to respect as far as possible the character of the medieval street pattern.' By the time the Corporation engineers

are finished, what's left of that pattern will be entirely obliterated. But then, they never had much feeling for the city and its fabric. The engineers may not have been lured down from the Kerry mountains with lumps of raw meat – like Brendan Behan's guards – but most of them hailed from wild places well outside the Pale. They came to Dublin with a mission to reshape the city for the convenience of private motorists. For them, it was like a maddening jigsaw puzzle in which none of the pieces seemed to fit. So they shaved off corners here and ironed out bends there and turned narrow little streets into big wide roads. And when they weren't pulling down the city's building stock, they occupied themselves drawing up even more extravagant motorway plans and left them to become a source of perpetual blight for decades. The engineers were able to get away with this because they always held the whip hand, tracing their lineage in local government back to Victorian times. The city planners, by contrast, were mere parvenus, without the power to impose their will even if they had a mind to do so. Thus, in any contest between the two professions, the engineers usually won hands down. Throughout, they also had the attentive ear of successive city managers, who were more than willing to endorse their road schemes, regardless of the social and economic cost.

Way back in 1962, planner Colin Buchanan produced a major report on traffic in towns for the British government. Commenting on its findings at the time, he said, 'I am not seeking to lay down the law about cars in cities. All I am saying is that to attempt to go the whole way for cars, to allow the full gamut of future increase, and to allow public transport to run down in the process, could produce cities which are no longer cities, but disintegrated sequences of parking lots, highways and clumps of buildings.' Almost a quarter of a century later, Dublin Corporation is still pursuing just such a policy. In the inner city alone, between the Grand and Royal canals, a total of *eighty-two* streets are affected by road-widening proposals and there are also plans for nine completely new roads. Each and every scheme depends on the wholesale demolition of existing buildings to gain, perhaps, an extra ten or fifteen feet of road space – barely the width of two illegally parked cars. Narrow streets

induce a state of near apoplexy among the engineers and their road widening zeal is underscored by a 1919 by-law which decrees that the city's streets should have a minimum width of twenty-four feet.

The Liffey quays, from Kingsbridge to the Custom House, are a particular target on the Corporation's hit list. Altogether, they are afflicted by no less than twenty-four separate road schemes – and this, more than anything else, explains why the quays have become so miserably derelict. Even listed buildings, such as Merchant's Arch and the Sunlight Chambers, are threatened and yet the entire riverfront is supposed to be a 'conservation area' needing sensitive treatment. The planners prefer to close their eyes to this paradox, happily reassuring themselves that the maximum set-back required on any quayside frontage is only thirteen feet. But whether the requirement is thirty, thirteen or even three feet, the Corporation's blind insistence on turning the quays into major traffic routes will inevitably mean the demolition of most, if not all, of the existing quayfront buildings.

The Corporation's record clearly shows that no amenity in the city is safe from the depredations of its engineers. Even that treasured waterway, the Grand Canal, might now be covered in a major road if one of their more sinister schemes had been implemented. As usual, City Hall tried to conceal its intentions from the public by dissimulation and subterfuge. The plan, as announced in 1963, was to close the waterway 'temporarily' so that two large sewers could be laid in its bed. In truth, however, this was a Trojan horse for monstrous proposals to replace the canal with a six-lane dual-carriageway, complete with ramps and flyovers. Fortunately, conservationists were quick to grasp the salient fact that the sewerage scheme itself would destroy the canal. It would have meant removing all the lock gates, blasting out the rock bed and demolishing most of the locks and bridges between Inchicore and Ringsend. The Corporation's own experts were fully aware of this; indeed, it was at the very core of their strategy. Once the canal had been turned into a linear building site, devastated beyond recognition, people would see that their road plan was the only viable option. They had even prepared a scale model of the dual-carriageway, ready to be

unveiled at the opportune moment. But when its existence was revealed prematurely, the Corporation deceitfully claimed that the model was merely designed to assist in the assessment of 'long-term options'.

The Corporation's mad pursuit of the canal road plan helps to explain why senior officials were so reluctant to discuss the sewerage scheme in any detail and why, for so long, they obdurately refused to consider any alternative. As late as 1968, assistant city manager Ruairi Ó Brolcháin was still crudely dismissing proposals that the sewers should be laid in a tunnel alongside the canal. Even to make an estimate of the costs involved would be 'a complete waste of time . . . an obviously useless exercise', he declared. And though more than 10,000 people signed a petition calling on the Corporation to change its mind, gullible city councillors swallowed official claims, unsupported by any facts or figures, that the tunnel alternative would be immeasurably more expensive. The government was not so easily taken in. Kevin Boland approved the 'temporary' canal closure in principle, but only on condition that it would be fully restored as a waterway. In effect, he had called the Corporation's bluff. Unable to meet his condition, except at enormous expense, the engineers reluctantly settled for the more realistic tunnel solution. Not long afterwards, in December 1970, it was announced that responsibility for the canals was to be transferred from CIE to the Office of Public Works, thus ensuring their long-term survival. Another *fifteen years* were to slip by before a bill was published to fulfill this promise.

The Grand Canal scheme had its origins in a major traffic study prepared for the Corporation by a German consultant. Professor Schaecterle, an engineer from Hamburg, had been hired in 1959 to take a look at Dublin's traffic problems and, in the manner of all clever consultants, the report he produced six years later endorsed what his clients were planning to do anyway. Schaecterle's solution was based on widening all arterial roads linking up with an 'outer ring' dual-carriageway roughly on the line of the two canals. Within this ring, there would be an 'inner tangent' road snaking around the city centre from St Stephen's Green through the Liberties, over to North King Street and Parnell Street, back across the Liffey

at Butt Bridge and then returning, via Pearse Street and Westland Row, to the Green. On top of all that, Schaecterle favoured the wholesale widening of the Liffey quays – though it was decidedly unrealistic, in the year Liberty Hall was completed, to propose that Eden Quay should be re-made to cater for eight lanes of traffic. That apart, the German professor's twenty-year-old report still forms the basis for much of the Corporation's road 'improvement' strategy. Yet despite appeals from the RIAI and other bodies, its planning and environmental implications have *never* been examined by a full-scale public inquiry.

But then, it would have been hard to keep up with the plethora of plans for dealing with Dublin's traffic problems. Schaecterle was followed in 1971 by Foras Forbartha's more wide-ranging Dublin Transportation Study, which recommended a two-pronged approach – a seventy-mile motorway 'box', largely outside the urban area, with much greater use of public transport for trips to and from the centre. However, as soon as it was published, the rival road and rail lobbies went off in different directions, commissioning yet more studies to support their own favourite hobby-horses. Thus, CIE came up with the Voorhees report on a rapid transit system, which quite sensibly – if extravagantly – proposed linking up and extending the existing railway lines with an underground in the city centre. Meanwhile, the Corporation gave us the utterly unreal Travers Morgan report, which would have ringed and bisected the city centre with a maze of highways, underpasses, flyovers and spaghetti junctions – one of them almost in front of St Patrick's Cathedral!

'The Morgan plan for Dublin seems to solve our traffic problems, but in fact it doesn't go far enough', wrote the acidly-observant Father Paul Freeney, one of the few priests to take a keen interest in the environment. 'My proposal, which I offer free of charge (Morgan got £100,000) is as follows: (1) Explode a thermonuclear bomb in O'Connell Street. This will devastate a huge circle of about four square miles. (2) Cover this circle with tarmacadam or concrete. This will be the central parking area. (3) Construct 5 sixteen-lane motorways from the centre, so that there will be no delay in getting there as quickly as possible. As an added bonus,

one can also get away from the bloody place in no time.'

Father Freeney said this was 'the only logical outcome' of the Corporation's road plans for Dublin. 'Once we accept that a city which has taken over a thousand years to grow must now, in a couple of decades, be moulded to suit the individual charioteer, then there is no alternative', he declared. The good priest was pin-pointing the fact that the Corporation's policy, for all its pious platitudes about encouraging the use of public transport, is firmly directed towards catering for the movement of *vehicles* rather than the movement of *people*. This misguided approach was neatly summed up some years later by George Redmond, one-time manager of the planning department. Describing the Corporation's road plans as 'modest proposals', he insisted that they had to cater for a growing car population. 'You can't put restraints on car ownership – politically, it's just not on', he said in 1979. 'Motorists feel they have a God-given right to drive where they please and there is no political will to stop them. It is a question of individual freedom and they won't have it taken away. Ever since Adam and Eve, it's been the same story.'

Thus, the Corporation is firmly wedded to the demented notion that Dublin's traffic problems can be 'solved' through the multiplication of roads rather than the control of cars. In pursuing such a 'policy', the engineers are denying the simple truth, long accepted in most civilised cities, that the more road space they create, the more it will fill up with cars. Even Los Angeles, that urban jungle built around the automobile, has traffic jams on its ten-lane freeways. Yet, in spite of the compelling evidence that it won't work, our antediluvian engineers seem hell-bent on giving Dublin its own set of motorways, within and without the city. Their most ambitious scheme was the so-called Eastern by-pass – a six-lane dual carriageway running from Merrion Gates along Sandymount Strand, looping around Ringsend to cross the Liffey at Macken Street, then heading northwards through the North Strand, Clonliffe Road and Griffith Avenue to join the Belfast road at Santry. From the river as far as Croke Park, the road conveniently followed the route of the Royal Canal, making nonsense of the Corporation's declared objective to 'maintain and improve' its amenity value for northside

residents. But then, even on the more favoured south side, the road plan would obliterate Sandymount Strand, an 'amenity' in Dublin long before the term was invented. On top of all that, over one hundred houses would have to be demolished while hundreds more would become uninhabitable due to their close proximity to the new road.

Not surprisingly, the scheme provoked widespread opposition from conservation groups and residents' associations. They saw the 'by-pass' as a path of destruction and wondered why their homes and their areas should be sacrificed for the sake of selfish suburban commuters. They also pointed out, quite rightly, that the so-called by-pass would not, in fact, be a by-pass at all. With ramps leading into the street system at Summerhill and Pearse Street, this major road would become merely a faster way of funnelling more and more cars into the city centre. Even so, the engineers dismissed all opposition – no matter how well-reasoned – as emanating from a 'virulent anti-roads lobby' and, in 1976, they persuaded city councillors to include the 'by-pass' in the revised draft development plan. Fianna Fáil *en bloc* as well as several Fine Gael and some renegade Labour councillors backed the scheme on the quite spurious grounds that it would 'help to relieve traffic congestion'. Four years later, under intense pressure from their own constituents, the councillors reversed this decision and voted to drop the scheme. That should have killed it, but the Corporation's engineers are nothing if not tenacious and they never take no for an answer – even from their political masters. So they kept the Eastern by-pass alive by commissioning a new study of the options from a firm of outside consultants and their report, published in 1981, substantially endorsed the Corporation's original scheme. But now, like Windscale to Sellafield, it has been re-named the Inner City Relief and Port Access Route, and the cost is put at £100 million.

The engineers suffered another temporary setback when the City Council voted to throw out their Inner Tangent ring, which had been on the stocks since Schaecterle with only the High Street section completed. Dubbed 'The Road To God Knows Where' because of its curious dog-legged route, the Inner Tangent had a much more devastating impact on Dublin's fabric than any Eastern by-pass. Indeed, the planning blight along its path bears horrific witness to the pig-headedness of the Corporation. Nowhere is this more sickeningly apparent than on North King Street, the most derelict and woe-begotten thoroughfare in the city. Littered with vacant sites, scrapyards, billboards and half-demolished buildings, it has been willed out of existence by the engineers, marked down for conversion into an eighty-foot-wide dual carriageway. For the past thirty years, local people have had to live with a steadily deteriorating environment, yet many of them were only vaguely conscious of the fact that City Hall was the author of their misfortune. As *In Dublin* discovered in a random door-to-door survey, hardly anyone knew about the Inner Tangent, though most people had heard talk over the years about a Compulsory Purchase Order for some unspecified road plan. One woman whose home is on the hit list howled with laughter at the mention of Corporation officials. 'You deal with one of them, then eventually he dies and the next one comes along, and so on', she said. 'The Corporation are mad – it's not them councillors, sure they don't come into it at all – it's the City Manager. From him down, they're all mad.'

It is a measure of this madness that, on the Inner Tangent route alone, more than twenty pubs are scheduled for demolition as well as about two hundred other buildings – houses, shops, warehouses and factories – and Queen Maeve Bridge, the oldest and finest on the Liffey, not forgetting the scores of buildings already demolished. Yet at no time has the Corporation provided even a tentative estimate of the total cost of this insane scheme. Limited figures have trickled out at CPO inquiries for piecemeal stretches of the route, like Parnell Street, where the road construction cost for a ninety-foot dual-carriageway, scarcely six hundred yards long, was put at £660,000 in February 1980. But the bill for acquiring the affected buildings on that same stretch, purely to demolish them, came to more than *seven times* that figure. Using this as a benchmark and also allowing for inflation, the total cost of the Inner Tangent is likely to top £70 million – all of it public money, of course. But since this traffic route represents only 15 per cent of the Corporation's road package for the

inner city, the full price-tag for what the engineers have in mind could well exceed £400 million.

City councillors were kept in the dark about the staggering cost of the schemes put before them for approval. For most of them, the almost endless series of streets designated for widening were just names on a list, to be nodded through without much dissent. As one Fine Gael member said, 'I'm a councillor. I'm not an engineer. There are people working full-time on these plans and surely they know what they're on about.' Some councillors, indeed, were ignorant and proud of it, their blind faith in the professionals undisturbed by even the smallest of nagging doubts. Others had their consciousness raised by the publication of *Hands Off Dublin*, Deirdre Kelly's searing indictment in words and pictures of what the Corporation had in store for the city. But when the councillors took courage in May 1980 and voted to ditch the Inner Tangent, Corporation officials deviously set about subverting this democratic decision. They pointed out that it was a 'material alteration' of the Development Plan, so the whole scheme would have to go on display to allow for public submissions before being brought back, once more, to the City Council for a final decision.

The Corporation has a way of keeping such things quiet, and its Inner Tangent 'exhibition' at City Hall was ever so discreet. To find out that it was on, hawk-eyed citizens would have to spot a once-off small ad in the legal notice columns of a single national daily newspaper. They would also have needed to know that 'The Right Honourable The Lord Mayor, Aldermen and Burgesses of the County Borough of Dublin' was, in fact, Dublin Corporation conveniently kitted out in its obscurantist post-medieval disguise. Naturally, nobody living along the line of the road was personally notified. But even if they had all received letters, most of them would have been unable to attend the 'exhibition'. It was staged in the month of July, open mornings and afternoons five days a week, and closed at lunchtime, in the evenings and at weekends. Little wonder, then, that so few people managed to catch it – and most of them would only have seen an almost meaningless diagrammatic representation of the road plan. The road-widening maps, which told the real

story in graphic detail, were secreted away in an ante-room behind a closed door. Only those who asked, a fraction of the already small attendance at the 'exhibition', actually got to see them.

This sham produced predictable results, with objections to the Inner Tangent swamped by submissions from the motorway lobby. Councillors' mailbags fairly bulged with letters from the Automobile Association, the Confederation of Irish Industry, the PMPA, the Port and Docks Board, Dublin Chamber of Commerce and numerous large firms with business interests in the city centre. All of them had been alarmed by the City Council's rejection of the Eastern by-pass and they were determined that the Inner Tangent would not end up in the same waste-basket. Their lobbying was greatly aided by the unprecedented surge in car sales following Fianna Fáil's reckless decision to abolish road tax. In 1979, a stunning total of 107,000 new cars had been sold in the Republic, and this immeasurably worsened Dublin's traffic problems as well as adding to the clamour from motorists for bigger and better roads. Under the weight of irresistible pressure, backed up by the unanimous advice of its own officials, the City Council voted to reinstate the Inner Tangent in October 1980. Five years later, only one new section – a short stretch at Lower Bridge Street – has been completed while CPOs have yet to be served on property owners along the remainder of the route. All the Corporation has to show for its efforts is a wasteland of dereliction.

At the same time, the needs of public transport were receiving scant attention. The bus service had become a sick joke, mainly because buses had to compete for the same road space with the burgeoning army of private cars. And when CIE proposed an experimental bus-only lane on Parliament Street, scarcely one hundred yards long, it took an incredible eighteen months for the scheme to be implemented. The traffic by-laws didn't allow for even one lane on a single street to be given over to buses, so the scheme had to be hawked around a dozen different bodies – including Balbriggan Town Commissioners – for their consideration and approval. It was all part of a debilitating dialogue of the deaf between CIE, Dublin Corporation and the gardai, each of whom was

responsible for separate aspects of transportation in the city. In an attempt to sort out this mess and knock heads together, the government-appointed Transport Consultative Commission recommended an entirely new regime. There were to be bus priority measures on every arterial road leading into the city centre as well as a crackdown on the plague of illegal parking, a special task force to get the traffic moving and, finally, a Dublin Transportation Authority to take charge of the integrated planning and operation of transportation throughout the urban area. The report was published in April 1980 with a detailed timetable for the achievement of its 'urgent' programme of action. The new authority, for example, was supposed to be set up and working 'within eighteen months'. More than *five years* later, a toothless version of the original authority was only in the process of being set up. Because of bureaucratic in-fighting and political indecisiveness at the highest levels, all the commission can point to is a few dozen limited bus lanes and, perhaps, a slight improvement in parking law enforcement.

But if Dublin Corporation did precious little to smooth the path for public transport, it cared even less for pedestrians, the most defenceless of road-users. Their needs always rated far behind the engineers' supreme priority of catering for cars. At College Street, one of the busiest crossings in the city centre, the traffic lights stay green for pedestrians for all of *eight seconds.* Motorists, by contrast, enjoy a free run for ninety-eight seconds – more than twelve times as much. Of course, this was entirely consistent with the engineers' view of the city, which has a bizarre logic of its own – if one accepts their basic assumptions. Ordinary people would regard footpaths as being primarily for pedestrians. Not the engineers. As one of them said once, 'Footpaths are not for walking on, they're for putting services under.' Thus, the engineers insisted that all new footpaths should have a minimum width of nine feet so that they would serve as convenient covers for underground gas mains, electricity wires and telephone cables. One leading architect recalled a senior engineer's reaction to his proposal to incorporate a corner shop in one of the Corporation's inner city housing schemes. 'We disapprove of corner shops because

kids tend to congregate around them. They're a traffic hazard', the engineer declared. 'But if we don't build one with the houses, won't the kids have to cross the busy street to the shop on the far side?', asked the incredulous architect. 'Oh, don't worry about that', the engineer replied. 'We'll be demolishing that shop as part of our road-widening scheme.'

This kind of neanderthal mentality lay behind the Corporation's failure, for so long, to pedestrianise Grafton Street. For four blissful weeks in September 1971, the busy shopping street had been given over to pedestrians. But this 'experiment' ended abruptly when the Corporation closed George's Street for re-surfacing and directed the traffic though Grafton Street instead. For the next eleven years, shoppers were left to pick their way along narrow, crowded footpaths while fuming cars and belching buses trundled down the street. The Corporation persistently ignored calls to ban the traffic again, arguing – quite disingenuously – that the shopkeepers were against pedestrianisation because it attracted 'undesirables' to the street. The real reason, however, was the roads engineers' insistence that it couldn't be done until the width of Nassau Street was doubled to cater for two-way traffic between Grafton Street and Dawson Street. This would have meant destroying the great sweep of high railings along the boundary of Trinity College, but the engineers were so bent on getting their way that the college's new Arts Building had to be set back to take account of the road scheme. Good sense eventually prevailed and, in December 1982, Grafton Street once again became a wonderland for pedestrians. The traffic problem was solved by reducing the width of a footpath on Nassau Street – a simple expedient suggested almost ten years earlier by *Plan* magazine.

Trinity's great railings won a reprieve, though the college would have been quite willing to sacrifice them if that is what the Corporation wanted. Since 1971, the two institutions had been working together to secure the demolition of the entire west side of Westland Row, including the house where Oscar Wilde was born. Both had their own motives for getting rid of this fine late Georgian terrace. Trinity wanted to build a large science and engineering complex on the site, while the Corporation's road mania dictated that all thirty buildings

must be swept away so that the street could be widened by *ten feet*. And this utterly ruinous scheme was being pursued despite the fact that Westland Row had been designated for 'protection and improvement' as a street of 'civic design importance'. There were also serious contradictions in Trinity's position. In Paul Koralek's library, the college had given Dublin one of its most distinguished modern buildings, yet here it was conniving in the destruction of an important slice of the city's streetscape. Against intense local opposition, Trinity got planning permission in 1982 for a series of five-storey gable-fronted blocks set back behind high railings like those on Nassau Street. A year later, all of the old buildings at the corner of Westland Row and Pearse Street were demolished, apparently to make room for nothing more than a surface car park. But the college's plans came unstuck when it failed to winkle money from the government for the new science and engineering complex. As a former president of An Taisce, Provost W. A. Watts seemed ill-at-ease with the original plan, especially after the surviving terrace of houses had been repainted. Indeed, the latest indications were that Trinity would retain and refurbish these fine buildings – if the Corporation could be persuaded to drop its crazy road-widening scheme.

Apart from inner city housing, tree-planting and parks, everything the Corporation put its paws on seemed to turn into dust. Way back in 1967, a six-acre site at Charlemont Street was designated, in almost Orwellian terms, as 'Urban Renewal Study Area No. 3' and the planners hatched wildly ambitious plans to replace dozens of decent houses and shops with a brave new 'comprehensive redevelopment'. After Moore Street, it was to have been the largest single scheme ever undertaken by the Corporation. The sole purpose, according to Paddy Morrissey, then head of the ostrich-like development department, was 'to ensure the orderly development of the area and enhance the canal-side amenity for the citizens'. In pursuit of this laudable objective, a CPO was made in 1971 and confirmed three years later, but the Corporation soon found itself running a race against time with a wily group of claim-jumping speculators. Trading as Albert Holdings, they managed to grab almost half of the site

while the Corporation's back was turned and the CPO had expired before they could be dislodged. By 1977, all of the original buildings had been demolished and the cleared site was taken over by a large itinerant encampment consisting of twenty caravans and almost at many tents, with all the accoutrements of scrap cars, litter and horses. No wonder it became known as Dublin's Calcutta.

The itinerants were moved on three years later, the site was fenced in and the Corporation then widened part of Charlemont Street in preparation for a new road linking up with Harcourt Street. However, apart from a small scheme of twenty-eight houses, any further development was stymied by the continuing tussle between the Corporation and Albert Holdings. The company, controlled from the Isle of Man, had changed hands at least three times since 1971 and one of its latest directors was solicitor Tony Hanahoe, the one-time Dublin football star. He was fronting for Murphy International, the British-based civil engineering contractors whose largest project in Ireland was the Cork-Dublin natural gas pipeline. But what Murphy had in mind for the Albert Holdings site had little to do with development. In March 1983, just in time to evade the payment of planning fees, the company sought outline permission for a large-scale commercial development, including over 200,000 square feet of offices. The fact that the office market had collapsed was irrelevant: this was a crude land valuation exercise, designed to protect the long-term value of the Charlemont Street property. To avoid a potential compensation claim, Corporation planners secretly agreed to grant permission for this scheme even though the entire area was zoned residential. However, under strong pressure from conservation groups and local community associations, the City Council stood by the zoning and voted to reject the proposed office 'development'. Albert Holdings, with a nod and a wink from the planners, then took its case to Bord Pleanala and, without bothering to hold an oral hearing, the board duly overruled the City Council's democratic decision. But this advanced the cause of urban renewal not one inch, since there was no prospect of the scheme going ahead, at least until the market improved. Indeed, the likli-hood was that Charlemont Street would remain the largest

single derelict site in the city for the foreseeable future. And this was the grim harvest of almost twenty years of 'planning'.

The Corporation showed rather more single-minded zeal when it came to clearing out the north inner city. For more than a decade, the crowded tenement flats in the reconditioned Georgian houses of Gardiner Street, Summerhill and Sean MacDermott Street had been used as a dumping ground, a sociological 'sink' for problem tenants from other Corporation housing estates. Crime, delinquency and vandalism soared alarmingly and the area soon had the highest crime rate in the whole country. Old people were burned out of their flats, young girls were raped, motorists had their cars attacked at traffic lights and the area became a haven for muggers, shoplifters and other petty criminals operating in the city centre. The business community and the gardai could see no end to it unless something radical was done. For them, the north inner city was like a cancerous tumour requiring immediate excision and it was up to the Corporation to wield the scalpel. Under intense pressure, the planners hastily cobbled together an ill-considered 'master plan' and launched it, in a blaze of publicity, in August 1978. All of the Georgian tenements, a total of over 700 flats, were to be demolished and, in their place, there was to be a lot of open space, considerable commercial development, a multi-storey car park and no more than sixty local authority town houses. 'Slums to be City's Sunset Strip' was the *Irish Independent*'s ludicrous headline over an equally ludicrous story describing the plan as 'the most radical housing proposal of the century'.

Local people were stunned. Nobody in the community had been consulted or even informed in advance, so the Corporation's announcement was a bolt from the blue. They pledged to resist what amounted to a mass eviction, followed by almost certain transportation to the Van Diemen's Land of the outer suburbs, cut off from kith and kin. Many of them had strong roots in the area, stretching back generations, and they wanted to stay there – preferably in new houses with little gardens, just like the ones in Ringsend. To press home their case, men, women and children marched to the planning department in the Irish Life Centre. However, they couldn't gain entry because someone had pulled back the

retractable drawbridges over the dry moat in front, leaving the planners free to look down on the frustrated demonstrators from their bronze-tinted windows.

The Corporation would not have budged at all but for the local elections of June 1979, when councillors seeking a new term had to promise to make changes in the original plan. Thus, after belated consultations with local interests, the planners went back to the drawing-boards to produce an alternative scheme of 200 town houses, two and three storeys high, each with its own garden. No serious consideration was given to the possibility of retaining any of the original buildings, though most of them were structurally sound and their loss would irreparably destroy the scale and streetscape of the area. The multi-storey car park remained in the plan and, as built in Marlborough Street, it must rank as one of the nastiest of its type anywhere in the world. But the most incredible proposal of all was a three-acre 'park' at the corner of Summerhill and Gardiner Street, which the planners tried to sell as some sort of miniature northside version of St Stephen's Green. The local youth employment action group didn't warm to the idea – Mountjoy Square, after all, was only a block away – and they wanted the site allocated for an IDA small industry 'cluster'. However, even after they had won the backing of the City Council, the planners continued to champion their pet park project – going to the extreme lengths of arguing against the IDA scheme at a Bord Pleanala oral hearing in September 1984. Fortunately for the many unemployed young people in the area, this attempt to subvert democracy proved unsuccessful, and even the Taoiseach congratulated the local action group on their victory which, as he noted discreetly, had been achieved against great odds.

Not far away, in North Great George's Street, individual conservationists were engaged in a heroic struggle to save some of Dublin's finest late eighteenth-century houses. With little or no support from any outside agency, they rescued house after house from the depths of degradation, painstakingly restoring every splendid feature to its original perfection. But instead of being applauded for this singular contribution to the city, they found themselves blackguarded as 'the gin-and-tonic brigade'. And this abuse was heaped

upon them by pig-ignorant city councillors, who seemed to see it as their bounden duty to frustrate every improvement scheme put forward by the local preservation society. Yet the only blots on the landscape of North Great George's Street were owned by the Corporation itself. One was a surface car park on the site of a group of houses demolished in the dangerous buildings scare of the early 1960s, and the other was a badly dilapidated terrace, which the Corporation had leased to the Legion of Mary in the late 1940s. These sad houses were finally demolished in 1984, despite insistent pleas for their preservation from the preservation society's voluble chairman, Joycean scholar David Norris. The Corporation then added insult to injury by preparing to replace them with a squat four-storey housing scheme, totally out of scale and sympathy with the grandeur of the street. Ironically, if private developers were involved, they would have been required *by the Corporation* to build it in a Georgian replica style. In this case, as in so many others, the Corporation was merely demonstrating its unshakeable devotion to the most cynical of double standards.

The stultifying bureaucracy at local and national level, and its abject failure to deal with Dublin's problems, is nowhere more fittingly symbolised than in Dame Street. For here, appropriately sandwiched between City Hall and the Castle, is one of the ugliest derelict sites in the city – and every square inch of it is publicly-owned. There's a slatted hoarding in front, painted in the city's official colours of blue and white, and in among the weeds and the rubble there are more fences zig-zagging through the site, delineating the boundaries of what's owned by the Corporation, the OPW and the Department of Posts and Telegraphs. Of the dozen or so five-storey Georgian buildings that once stood there, only one survives. Propped up by the remnants of gutted houses on both sides, it's the headquarters of the Sick and Indigent Roomkeepers Society, Ireland's oldest charitable institution. Everything else, including Mason's, the long-established opticians, was whipped away in the mid-1970s for road-widening and redevelopment. At the time Charles Aliaga Kelly described the scheme as 'a wonderful opportunity to improve the setting of City Hall and the approaches to the Castle'.

More than ten years later, this simple goal remains glaringly unfulfilled, largely because the Corporation couldn't get rid of the Roomkeepers Society. With some imagination, a dignified new office block could have been built around the society's historic premises, but such is the obsession with securing 'cleared sites' for redevelopment that this option wasn't even considered. And throughout the entire period, while the site was shamelessly left to become a major eyesore, the state was taking up acre after acre of rented office space to accommodate its civil servants.

Every so often, Frank Feely or assistant city manager Sean Haughey (Charlie's brother, the man in charge of the development department) would get on to the Office of Public Works to find out what their plans were. The Faceless Ones had no plans, however, other than a vague notion that the site might be tied into long-term proposals for the renovation of Dublin Castle. In desperation, the Corporation thought of turning it into a little park. A park, no less! Whenever the Corporation was confronted by a knotty redevelopment problem, the 'solution' was to plant a few trees. It's the urban planning equivalent of bringing on the dancing girls.

Conclusion

'Apart from its priceless cultural value, Europe's architectural heritage gives to her peoples the consciousness of their common history and common future. Its preservation is, therefore, a matter of vital importance... Since these treasures are the joint possession of all the peoples of Europe, they have a joint responsibility to protect them against the growing dangers with which they are threatened – neglect and decay, deliberate demolition, incongruous new construction and excessive traffic... Architectural conservation must be considered, not as a marginal issue, but as a major objective of town and country planning.'

What is to be done? In the first instance, as Arthur Gibney has said, we must ask ourselves a rather basic question: do we, the people of Dublin, really *want* a city? On the evidence of the past twenty-five years, it would appear that we don't. People get the cities they deserve. And if our capital city has been reduced to a shambles, it is because we never cared enough to save it. Through our own apathy, we acquiesced in the destruction of Dublin. We can't even say that the city was destroyed before our very eyes because, when it comes to our environment, most of us seem to be as blind as bats. We simply do not *see* what is going on around us. If half of O'Connell Street were whipped away tomorrow morning, most Dubliners would probably shrug their shoulders and say, 'So what else is new?'. Others would bemoan the loss and wonder why, and fewer still would take the trouble to find out.

It's not as if we are ignorant of urban ideals. Those of us who are not content to spend two weeks frying on a beach in Benidorm find ourselves drawn, almost magnetically, to the great cities of Europe – to Paris or Amsterdam, Edinburgh

or Vienna, Venice, Florence or Rome. Why? Because, as Arthur Gibney pointed out, we yearn to experience, even for just a few days, something we can't experience at home: the City as a Work of Art. The European cities we flock to in such large numbers may be large or small, but they all share one essential quality in common: they are *civilised*. Only once, in Dublin's long history, have we shown the kind of vision and unity of purpose which shaped the cities we admire so much. That was in the late eighteenth century when the Wide Streets Commissioners set about transforming Dublin into a capital city worthy of the name. The Georgian streets and squares, even some of the great public buildings, were built by hard-headed speculators. But at least they were working to an overall plan, an urbane vision of the city.

What so distinguishes Dublin today from the civilised capitals of Europe is that we have squandered our patrimony. The only reason why the grand boulevards of Paris are not disfigured by modern office blocks is because the people of the city exercised their communal will to prevent it. With the sole exception of the Tour Montparnasse, all of the high-rise horrors were built in an office ghetto outside the gates. Similarly, the canals of Amsterdam are still lined with seventeenth-century gable-fronted houses, leaning this way and that like old people on a park bench, because the citizens thought they were worth keeping. These buildings, the essential Amsterdam, were not threatened by road-widening schemes, still less by publicly-paid zombies who might have condemned them as 'dangerous'. And if the Georgian New Town of Edinburgh is largely intact today, it is due to the success of a well-organised conservation movement in staving off any and all attacks on its fabric.

'Money talks everywhere, but in Ireland nothing else talks', Patrick Kavanagh sagely observed in 1967. By remaining silent for so long, we gave the property speculators a blank cheque to play Monopoly with the streets of Dublin. Wood Quay apart, the conservation cause never became a *movement* enjoying widespread popular support. Activists will, of course, always be a minority. But it is surely beyond belief that the burden of defending the city's architectural heritage was left to no more than a few dozen committed preservation-

ists, as forlorn as the little Dutch boy with his finger in the dyke. Early in 1985, An Taisce was so bereft of public support that its Dublin branch could barely afford to pay the relatively modest £36 fee for lodging appeals with Bord Pleanala – even for vital test cases. But if An Taisce was in dire straits, the financial position of smaller conservation groups was even worse. The Dublin Civic Group and the Living City Group had no funds at all and, whenever they wanted to make an appeal *in the public interest*, members had to dig into their own pockets to pay the fees. This is an appalling situation. It means, in effect, that there is virtually nobody minding the store. Unless many more people get involved, demonstrating their concern for the city in a tangible way, the prospect of saving Dublin must be rated as negligible to non-existent.

The wider public will soon have an opportunity to express their views. For the past two years, Dublin Corporation planners have been reviewing the City Development Plan, and the results of their labours are likely to be put on exhibition for all to see in 1986. The review, undoubtedly the most important since the first draft plan of 1967, is being carried out under the direction of Gay McCarron, the Corporation's new chief planning officer. McCarron, a rather diffident and self-effacing architect, slipped into the hot seat in January 1984 following the retirement of Charles Aliaga Kelly. He was not, however, a new broom; nobody who gets to a senior position in Dublin Corporation ever is. Like everyone else, McCarron had worked his way slowly and steadily up through the ranks, playing ball with the bureaucrats every step of the way. He's been at it a long time, having joined the planning department way back in 1963 and taken a hand in most of the major schemes hatched since then. (The Lichfield plan for Moore Street, or rather its tattered remains, was one of his more notable projects.) McCarron had learned to live with the Corporation's limitations and he could be trusted not to rock the boat. Thus, his pledge on taking up the top job that he was prepared to innovate, to look at things in a new way, was greeted by outside observers with some considerable scepticism.

Even with its battery of planning controls, the Corporation

is clearly unable to impose order on the chaos created by free market forces and, to that extent, it has shown itself to be a paper tiger. But in at least one area – road planning – City Hall has total control, and if Gay McCarron really means to show his mettle, he must be seen to clobber the engineers. He is on record as saying that their devastating road plans are being scrutinised 'individually and collectively'. This is not enough, not by a long shot. If the chief planning officer and his ultimate boss, City Manager Frank Feely, want to pay more than lip-service to the preservation of Dublin's built heritage, they will have to go a great deal further. What is required is the abandonment of most, if not all, of the street-widening schemes listed in the 1980 development plan. Civic design and architectural conservation must take precedence over the assumed need to create more road space, and this should become the guiding principle in any assessment of the engineers' plans. Such a move would, at a stroke, end the Corporation's shameful role as a prime culprit in the destruction of Dublin.

Naturally, the engineers will wage a fierce bureaucratic battle to save their precious plans, but this time they may find themselves on the losing side. Their ground has been weakened by at least three hopeful developments. First, annual sales of new cars have hit the rock-bottom figure of 55,000 – just half of what they were in 1979 – and this has had a favourable impact on traffic congestion in the city. Secondly, the number of people cycling to work has increased dramatically in recent years, and cyclists now account for over 7 per cent of all commuters travelling to and from the city centre. This, too, has helped to relieve the overall traffic problem. Thirdly, the success of the East Link toll bridge, combined with plans to restore the Royal Canal, has greatly undermined the engineers' case for their most ambitious project – the Eastern by-pass. Finally, the Department of the Environment has made it clear that there will be no government grants for 'unnecessary' road-widening schemes in the inner city.

Dublin's transportation problem will have to be solved in other ways, primarily by investing in public transport. Here again, however, some harsh realities must be faced. The elec-

trification of the Howth-Bray railway line was supposed to be the first stage of an integrated rapid transit system serving much of the city. But the enormous cost, at £113 million, has effectively scuppered the rest of the scheme. It would, of course, be wonderful to have DART trains running underground through the city centre, linking up with the far-flung suburbs and generally knitting the city together. Indeed, we might now be enjoying such a metro-style service if the right moves had been made back in the early 1970s. As usual, however, all we got was shilly-shallying from successive governments, none of whom could bring themselves to take a decision on the rapid transit project based on an adequate evaluation of its merits. Even Fianna Fáil's belated approval for the Howth-Bray electrification was merely a political gimmick, timed to coincide with the 1979 European and local elections. But that is as far as DART is likely to get. Because of all the dithering and vacillation, the cost of extending the scheme to other areas has become so prohibitive that no government – certainly not in the current climate of stringency – would be prepared to stand over it.

If not DART, then what? Dublin desperately needs some form of mass transit; buses alone, of their very nature, cannot provide the complete answer. According to popular mythology, the most senseless and short-sighted decision in our long catalogue of transportation errors was the closure, in 1959, of the Harcourt Street railway line. Much more calamitous, in terms of its impact on the city as a whole, was the scrapping ten years earlier of the entire tramway network. Buses, it was felt at the time, would be more 'flexible'. What wasn't foreseen was that the very inflexibility of the trams would have become their major asset in the upcoming battle for road space between public and private transport. Operating on their own tracks, the trams would have a guaranteed right-of-way through the streets, regardless of the level of traffic congestion. Had the tramway system been retained, it could have been upgraded and extended to serve the new suburbs. The antiquated double-deckers would have been replaced, in time, by single-decker articulated vehicles like the trams in common use throughout the continent. Coupled together, these hurtling monsters can carry up to 600 passengers – seven

times the capacity of a CIE bus – and if the government is really looking for a cheaper *mass transit* alternative to DART, trams just might be the answer. How about starting with a tramway on the old Harcourt Street line?

The Corporation, meanwhile, must get on with the job of protecting Dublin's architectural heritage. At present, less than seven hundred Georgian houses are listed for preservation, of which only twenty-three are located on the northside of the city. And despite the fact that the Corporation has had the power to do so since 1976, not one single interior – even the most splendid examples of eighteenth-century craftsmanship – has been afforded protection of any kind. An Taisce has estimated that, since 1980, at least fifty houses supposedly listed for complete preservation have suffered serious material alterations detrimental to their architectural character. In addition, of the houses included in the softer 'List 2' category, dozens have been replaced by modern blocks with lifeless 'replica' facades. If the surviving stock of Georgian architecture is not to be depleted still further, it is imperative that many more houses are listed for strict preservation.

However, the planners must not be myopic, and their lists should be broadened to cover the best architecture *of all periods*, right up to the present day. Thus, some protection might be given to the *art deco* headquarters of the Gas Company in D'Olier Street or Burton's, on the corner of Dame Street and South Great George's Street, as well as such modern buildings as Busaras, the US Embassy, Irish Life's former headquarters on Mespil Road, TCD's library, Lisney's, Bord Bainne, Bowmaker's, Bord na Mona and perhaps one or two others. But just as the Corporation maintains a list of buildings scheduled for preservation, so it should draw up a list of the most execrable examples of modern 'architecture' and designate them *for demolition*. Such a list would necessarily include Hawkins House, O'Connell Bridge House, the Department of Justice, Guardian Royal Exchange, the Burlington Hotel, Aras an Phiarsaigh, Telephone House in Marlborough Street, River House in Chancery Street, Harcourt Square, Castle House and Wicklow House in South Great George's Street, Iveagh Court in Harcourt Road, the EEC offices in Molesworth Street, Jimmy Tully's office block in Eglinton

Road, Prizebond House and most of the rubbish in Lower Mount Street. This list is by no means exhaustive; others may wish to add to it.

Listing buildings for preservation, no more than listing them for demolition, will not of itself ensure the desired outcome; all it means is that they cannot be knocked down or materially altered without planning permission. Owners are not required by law to keep listed buildings in good repair. Indeed, it may be in their interest to allow such property to fall into disrepair as a prelude to demolition for a more lucrative development. The *Urbana* report estimated that 60 per cent of Dublin's List 1 Georgian houses were in need of major refurbishment while a further 20 per cent were in such a run-down condition that they required massive overhaul. But where is the money to come from? Under the 1963 Planning Act, the Corporation is empowered to assist private owners with the cost of maintaining listed buildings. For many years, not a penny was provided, but now there is a special conservation fund from which grants are dispensed for a variety of worthy causes. In 1984, the fund amounted to all of £30,000, roughly 0.01 per cent of the Corporation's budget for the year. Put in context, this ludicrously low sum is less than the cost of building just one inner city house and considerably less than the rates revenue from a single average-sized office block.

But if the Corporation is parsimonious, the government is even worse. The Department of the Environment, which finances all local authorities, has seen fit to allocate nothing whatever for architectural conservation either in Dublin or anywhere else. The owners of listed buildings are eligible for no more than the standard maximum home improvement grant of £1,200 which, in the case of a Georgian terrace house, would hardly cover the cost of painting the windows. And while they may offset maintenance bills against their tax liability, even this concession is conditional on the public enjoying 'reasonable access' to their property. By contrast, all 7,000 listed buildings in Northern Ireland are eligible for repair or maintenance grants and, over the past ten years, more than £5 million has been paid out by the state in support of almost one thousand conservation projects. The grants

may cover up to 50 per cent of the costs involved, whether the building is a stately home, a bank, terraced town house or humble thatched cottage. In this way, the Northern authorities have accepted the principle that listing buildings carries with it a responsibility to provide some form of assistance to the owners. Yet, in 1984, when the RIAI proposed a scheme of grant aid and tax reliefs for the restoration of older buildings south of the border, they were listened to with deaf ears. Indeed, Minister of State Fergus O'Brien privately described the architects' proposal as 'a Mickey Mouse scheme' and said they had 'dreamed up the whole thing to get work for themselves'. As long as Dublin, and the Republic in general, suffers from this sort of 'thinking' at the top echelons of government, there is no hope for us at all.

The state must liberate itself from a blind devotion to the cult of new, which seems to permeate the very bones of every department and agency. It is reflected in a whole range of policies, incentives and regulations all of which have one thing in common – a heavy bias in favour of new construction and against the conservation of existing buildings. For example, a crippling rate of stamp duty is charged on the purchase of old houses, while new houses are not only exempt from duty but their first-time purchasers also get grants and mortgage subsidies. More seriously, the Building Regulations – inspired by twentieth-century technology – offer no automatic dispensation for older buildings, even if they are listed for preservation. Concrete floors and elaborate fire escapes are easily incorporated in new buildings, but to insist on such requirements in, say, a two hundred-year-old Georgian house is as destructive as it is unrealistic. Thus, unless a special exemption is granted, buildings of outstanding architectural merit are in danger of being hacked to pieces or demolished altogether just to comply with regulations that weren't even wrtten with them in mind.

Paradoxically, the state is also obsessed with a cult of the old or, rather, the very old. National Monuments are narrowly confined to pre-historic burial mounds, archaeological sites and roofless medieval ruins. As a result, the Commissioners of Public Works can offer no guidance on whether the vast bulk of our building stock should be replaced or retained. As

Professor Alistair Rowan, chairman of the Irish Architectural Archive, has noted, 'Responsibility for historic architecture is not theirs, nor do they know what fine buildings exist or where they are.' Indeed, the Commissioners seem to lavish more attention on their ruins than they do on looking after the many important buildings in state care. They have, of course, won widespread public applause for the magnificent restoration of the Casino at Marino and the Royal Hospital at Kilmainham. What seems to be forgotten, however, is that these priceless treasures had been left practically derelict for decades before the latest works were undertaken or that several other buildings of immense architectural value and historical significance – such as the great Victorian glass-houses in the National Botanic Gardens or much of the complex that makes up Dublin Castle – are still waiting to be rescued from the depths of degradation. Even the Custom House, that jewel of eighteenth-century architecture, was left surrounded by a tatty hoarding for *five years* before a tap of work was done on the building. Meanwhile, we have witnessed the spectacle of Collins Barracks – the oldest military barracks in the world – being crudely defaced with cement by the Army Corps of Engineers. Not to mention the Commissioners of Public Works boldly defending the demolition of Lucan Courthouse so that it may be replaced by some half-baked 'replica' to provide a better standard of accommodation for the local gardai. If these latter cases illustrate anything, it is that the state can't be trusted with our national heritage and its blanket exemption from planning control must be brought to an end.

For the past ten years, though this may seem incredible, the state has been officially committed to a policy of putting conservation first. In 1975, Ireland joined the other member-states of the Council of Europe in signing the Declaration of Amsterdam. The fine words may ring hollow today, but this is what the Declaration said: 'Apart from its priceless cultural value, Europe's architectural heritage gives to her peoples the consciousness of their common history and common future. Its preservation is, therefore, a matter of vital importance . . . Since these treasures are the joint possession of all the peoples of Europe, they have a joint responsibility to protect them

against the growing dangers with which they are threatened – neglect and decay, deliberate demolition, incongruous new construction and excessive traffic . . . Architectural conservation must be considered, not as a marginal issue, but as a major objective of town and country planning . . . The legislative and administrative measures required should be strengthened and made more effective in all countries . . . To help meet the cost of restoration, adaptation and maintenance of buildings and areas of architectural and historic interest, adequate financial assistance should be made available to local authorities, and financial support and fiscal relief should likewise be made available to private owners. . . .'

If the state wishes to show, even at this late stage, that the Declaration of Amsterdam means more than mere words, it is going to have to start putting its money where its mouth is. Tax relief and/or grant aid for the owners of listed buildings are the *sine qua non* of any enlightened conservation policy though, in some parts of Dublin, even these incentives might not be enough. Henrietta Street, the oldest Georgian street in the city, is a case in point. Laid out in the 1730s, it was lined with the most magnificent houses ever built in Dublin, fashionable residences for the rich and famous, each one a palace in its own right. It is, perhaps, symbolic of the decline of this once-proud street that one of these splendid houses was occupied some years ago by a horse, who apparently lived on the second floor. Everyone agrees that Henrietta Street must be saved, but not even the valiant efforts of individual conservationists can reverse the tragic tide of degradation. The scale of the houses is so vast – a modern semi-detached, roof and all, would fit comfortably into one of the entrance halls – that the cost of restoration is daunting, if not prohibitive. There is only one way around this problem. The government must intervene, making sufficient money available to renovate at least the roofs and exterior fabric of the houses, thus leaving the owners free to restore the interiors. In the 1985 budget, the government generously provided £¼ million to bail out Dublin Zoo. It would probably take £1 million to help save Henrietta Street, but who could deny that it would be money well spent?

Of course, there is not much point in restoring an old build-

ing just for its own sake; there must be a viable use at the end of the day. Fortunately, however, there is growing evidence in Ireland that buildings which have outlived their original purpose can be recycled to serve twentieth-century needs. Powerscourt Townhouse, the National Concert Hall and the Guinness Hop Store are the most notable examples of this heartening trend, but there are several other less well known, though no less worthy schemes. What they signify is a belated realisation that older buildings of architectural merit are among the most tangible assets of society and, with a little imagination, it can make sound economic sense to adapt them to modern uses. However, such recycling projects require a high degree of professional expertise, and this is where we fall down. It has been estimated that there are probably no more than thirty Irish architects and fewer than ten structural engineers who could be regarded as skilled in conservation work. Many practising architects, especially the 'modern movement' types, might benefit from a crash programme of re-education, but the primary responsibility for meeting future needs rests with the schools of architecture; it is up to them to make conservation a core subject on the curriculum. Certainly, as more older buildings become redundant, there should be no shortage of work for a wider pool of professional talent. What, for example, is to be done with the Richmond Hospital complex, soon to be abandoned when the staff and patients move out to Beaumont? It is just one of many fine buildings for which new uses must be found.

The most serious long-term threat to Dublin's architectural heritage – after the Corporation's road-widening plans – lies almost hidden, in the disturbingly high level of vacant space throughout the city centre. Because shopping is almost exclusively a ground-floor operation, the upper floors of traditional four and five-storey buildings tend to be used only for storage, if they are used at all. This profligate waste of resources has had disastrous consequences. With so much upper floorspace underutilised, many buildings have become run-down through lack of maintenance leading, eventually, to demolition and replacement by single-storey structures. And because there is no longer a resident population in most city centre streets, shops are increasingly exposed to night-time

break-ins in spite of such desperate security measures as aluminium shutters, steel grilles, barbed wire and sophisticated alarm systems. One fairly obvious way of alleviating these problems would be to bring people back to live above the shops and business premises, as they do in most continental cities. Vacant floorspace could be converted into flats for students, single people and young married couples, thus contributing to the cause of conservation and greater security as well as breathing new life into an almost dead city centre.

The reason why this hasn't been done says a lot about the topsy-turvy economics of the property market. A building in part-residential use is simply worth less than a building in commercial use – even if it happens to be largely vacant and in a poor, bad or ruinous condition. Partly, this is a hangover from the days of rent control and troublesome sitting tenants, but it is also due to a fatuous hope among freehold owners that some cheque-waving office developer will come along one day and pay them a fat price for their property. In this, they are not alone. The hoarders of derelict land see the same crock of gold at the end of the rainbow, though there is one important difference – unlike other commercial property owners, they are not required to pay a penny in rates on their blight-ridden nest-eggs. This is a monstrous social injustice. In effect, it means that dereliction is positively encouraged while responsible conservation is penalised. Back in 1979, a special inter-departmental committee studying the inner city recommended the introduction of a system of progressive penal rating on derelict sites. Nothing was done. In November 1982, a similar pledge was included in the Fine Gael and Labour joint programme for government. In March 1984, Fergus O'Brien said the matter was still 'being examined' by his Department. In effect, it has been quietly forgotten – a tribute to the power of the property lobby and its effective stranglehold on public policy. Levying penal rates on the owners of derelict land might not be enough to encourage redevelopment, but it would at least be in line with that sound Victorian maxim that property has its duties as well as its rights. More usefully, it would provide the Corporation with a great deal of additional revenue, which could be employed to grant rate rebates to developers who convert vacant

city centre floorspace into much-needed residential flats. Simultaneously, to avoid charges of discrimination, the Corporation should be required to maintain a register of all publicly-owned derelict land indicating when each parcel was acquired, the purpose for which it was acquired and the time-scale envisaged for redevelopment.

The total area of land lying derelict in central Dublin has been estimated at 150 acres, roughly six times the size of St Stephen's Green. If we are to rebuild the city – for that is the gargantuan task now facing us – we will need not only innovative planning policies, but also a sense of realism, especially in the private sector. For a start, the speculators hoarding derelict sites must be told that there is no Godot, so waiting around for him to show up is simply pointless. Let the message go out loud and clear: THE OFFICE BOOM IS OVER. Forecasts made ten years ago that Dublin would have more than 20 million square feet of new office space by 1991 have turned out to be pure fantasy. By 1984, after twenty-four years of often frenetic development, the total hadn't even reached 10 million square feet – and almost one-tenth of that remained vacant as a result of the dramatic downturn in demand. But such is the lure of offices that speculators are still wandering around the city with planning permission in their pockets for schemes which, in aggregate, would produce a further 6 million square feet to add to the space mountain. Virtually none of this is likely to be built, if only because nobody wants it. With rents now falling rather than rising, white-faced property men see no prospect of a recovery for at least five years – unless the state returns to the market in a big way, which it won't. The glum crystal-gazers also concede that any recovery will be modest in scale, not at all like the rock 'em, sock 'em days of yore.

What, then, are we going to build if not office blocks? There has to be an alternative and indeed there is. It has been staring us in the face, but so blinded are we by conventional attitudes that we haven't even seen it. That alternative, in a word, is flats. Over the past five years, the pattern of housing development in Dublin has changed radically, with blocks of flats springing up like clover throughout the inner suburbs. So revolutionary was this change that, in 1983, the number

of flats built in the Dublin area actually exceeded the output of traditional semi-detached houses. This didn't happen by accident. It was greatly boosted by the 'Section 23' incentive in the 1980 Finance Act, which allowed anyone providing new flats for rent to write off the capital cost against their entire rental income, from whatever source. But even this generous concession would not have been enough, in itself, to produce such dramatic results. There had to be a *market* for flats, a large pool of home-hunters prepared to look at these convenient living packages as an attractive alternative to standard suburban housing. Without that, purpose-built flats would not have become the phenomenon they are today.

The inner city has yet to see a slice, even a sliver, of the apartment boom. Only a small fraction of flats built so far are located within the canal ring – largely because the area is perceived as being neither fashionable nor secure. But perceptions are often wrong and, as such, they can be the greatest barrier to progress. Why shouldn't it be regarded as 'fashionable' to live in a well-designed block of flats at, say, Christchurch Place, with a view of the cathedral framed by your sittingroom window? Or in a converted warehouse looking out over the broad expanse of water in Grand Canal Basin? Or a refurbished building tucked away amid the warren of narrow streets around the Central Bank? Or almost anywhere along the quays, if something was done to change Anna Livia's malodorous brand of perfume? The truth is that we have never really thought about these possibilities. Our perception is that 'security' would be a major problem though, here again, we are probably wrong. The fact is that the crime rate has been *falling* in the inner city; only in the suburbs is criminal activity growing by leaps and bounds. But whatever one's perceptions, the course on which we have been set since the foundation of the state is getting us nowhere. Over the past sixty years, the inner city had lost almost half of its population to sprawling, featureless and overwhelmingly single-class suburbs further and further away from the core. Even today, when there is so much derelict land crying out for redevelopment at the very heart of the city, our planners are committed to building vast 'new towns' in the countryside duplicating, at great

public expense, a whole range of social facilities, all of which exist in abundance in the city centre. This is not just utterly senseless; it is insane.

The dire threat to the city from uncontrolled suburban expansion was dramatically underlined with the publication, in April 1985, of the ERDO 'settlement strategy' for the eastern region, which forecasts that the region's population could increase by 500,000 to 1.85 million by the year 2011. This is to be catered for by creating vast new residential and industrial agglomerations on the outer periphery of Dublin, with most of the housing taking the form of low-rise, low-density development, gobbling up no less than 18,000 acres of agricultural land. Yet, at a time when there are hundreds of acres of land lying derelict in the inner city, the ERDO strategists coldly write off the area as a locational option for accommodating even a small fraction of the projected population explosion. The cost would be too high, they say, almost in the same breath as they propose spending more than £500 million on new roads and the same again on sewers, to put almost everyone out in the suburbs. If their recommendations are implemented, the effect will be to condemn the centre of Dublin to becoming a rotten, hollowed-out core which expands in direct proportion to the rate of growth of the new suburbs. What we will see, therefore, is more of the decay and destruction, chronicled in this book, which has been such a feature of Dublin's development since 1960. If the city is to be saved, it goes without saying that this cannot be allowed to happen.

To reclaim the city, we will need to rekindle something of the spirit that moved the Wide Streets Commissioners two hundred years ago. However, it would be downright silly to believe that the Corporation, with its plodding bureaucracy, would measure up to the task in store. As Robin Walker, the only architect-member of Bord Pleanala, has remarked, the trouble about our planners today is that their plans 'have not the stuff to stir man's imagination'. They are also far too busily engaged in the mad pursuit of 'new towns' to give the city centre the undivided attention it deserves. New structures are urgently required, perhaps on the lines sketched out in 1982 as part of the 'Gregory Deal'. That was

the name given to an incredible package of promises extracted from Charlie Haughey by the independent inner city deputy, Tony Gregory, as the price of his support for Haughey's short-lived and GUBU-riddled minority administration. And though it was the product of rank political expediency, the deal at least contained some useful proposals. One key element was the pledge to establish an Inner City Development Authority, with special commissions to take charge of certain areas in dire need of urban renewal. A bill was even introduced in the Dáil to give effect to these changes, but it lapsed with the fall of the government and the new Coalition administration, untrammelled by dependence on inner city 'mavericks', showed no interest in reviving it.

The primary area designated for special treatment under the Gregory Deal was Custom House Docks, a 27-acre site with immense potential lying just east of the Custom House itself. It had been the target of Dublin's most surreal exercise in property speculation, a squalid scheme by the Port and Docks Board to maximise its value by getting permission, in the teeth of ferocious opposition, for more than one million square feet of offices. (Incredibly, this was a compromise; the board's original plan was for *two million* square feet.) No developer or consortium of developers could have undertaken such a mammoth project, even if the market for offices had remained bouyant. What the site does offer, however, is an unparalleled opportunity to create a new residential community within walking distance of the city centre. It should *not* be given over to Corporation housing; the city needs a balanced social mix and, if there is to be any hope of luring back the middle classes, any redevelopment scheme should concentrate on providing mutli-storey apartments for rent or owner-occupation. The first step would be to take the site into state ownership and then hold a major architectural competition, with all of the entries placed on public exhibition before a final judgment is made. Later, the various elements of the approved scheme could be farmed out by public tender to different developers. Handled in the right way, it could provide the key to unlock the hidden potential of almost 300 acres of redundant land stretching downriver as far as the East Link toll bridge. Formerly part of the docks,

this entire area is now being abandoned by its one-time major users, the Port and Docks Board and the Gas Company, so it is obviously ripe for redevelopment. A tentative master plan has already been proposed by a group of young architects, calling themselves the City Architecture Studio, under which both sides of the river would be rebuilt for a variety of uses – residential, commercial and industrial – to become a thriving new extension of the city. That is precisely what is being done in London, where the lower reaches of the Thames, beyond Tower Bridge, have become desirable areas to live and work. Indeed, such is the demand for luxury apartments in converted dockland warehouses that prices have topped £100,000.

A rescue plan for the city would be incomplete without imaginative measures to alleviate the desperate plight of the Liffey quays, from Kingsbridge to the Custom House, now so pock-marked by dereliction and decay that their condition is little short of a national disgrace. As the *Architectural Review* said in 1974, 'the success of any move to restore Dublin may be fairly measured by whether or not it brings to the quays a return to prosperity and coherence'. The first priority must be to scrap the Corporation's road plans; only then will it be possible to make a rational assessment of what quayside buildings should be retained and what should be replaced. An architectural competition could offer bright ideas for infill schemes on derelict sites, with the emphasis on buildings designed to maintain the existing elevational scale of the riverfront. To encourage redevelopment, the Corporation could revise the rating system, levying very low rates or none at all on the owners of buildings with the best 'mix' of uses – say, shops at ground-floor level, offices overhead and residential units on the upper floors. Conversely, mono-functional developments – like office blocks – would attract much higher rates, while the most penal rates of all would be charged on surface car parks and other derelict sites. The same carrot-and-stick approach might be adopted for other designated areas in need of renewal. And in cases where the owners of derelict land simply refuse to make their property available for development, it should be acquired by compulsory purchase order. In the past, CPOs have taken an

inordinately long time to process, often up to eight years, so there is obviously a need for legislative change to speed up the system.

Greed, as we have seen, is at the root of much of what happened to Dublin over the past twenty-five years. But even greed can be harnessed to socially useful purposes, given the right regime. The 'Section 23' incentive worked wonders for apartments in the inner suburbs; what is needed now is a similarly generous tax concession tailored specifically for flats within the canal ring. The cost to the Exchequer would be negligible, far outweighed by the enormous benefits to the city. This proposal was first put forward by the City Manager in 1983, but so endemic is the negligence of Dublin's needs at the highest levels that nobody in government bothered to listen, still less respond. Of course, the Corporation itself could help by selling off more of its own derelict land, at knock-down prices, to developers prepared to build apartment blocks; it could also raise its housing density standards to ensure that such schemes would prove more profitable. These relatively simple measures might be sufficient to get development off the ground; what they won't do is to guarantee a market for the finished product. That will require a change in public perceptions of the inner city and, perhaps, even a pioneering spirit from the first of its new residents. To encourage people to settle in the area, owner-occupiers of newly-built flats might – as the Construction Industry Federation has proposed – be allowed to offset a percentage of the purchase price each year against their taxable income.

The general environment of the city centre needs to be upgraded if it is to become a desirable place to live, rather than merely work. This could be achieved by pursuing co-ordinated area improvement schemes – for example, in the area around the Central Bank. Assuming that the Corporation dropped its road-widening plans and CIE its transporation centre, the spontaneous revival already in progress could be consolidated in a number of ways. Traffic might be banned from the narrow streets and they could even be re-paved, using the stock of street-setts and cobblestones at present scattered haphazardly throughout the city, often half-buried in tarmacadam. The profusion of derelict sites and surface

car parks would also have to be tackled, on lines already suggested, with the clear purpose of restoring the integrity of the streetscape. With tax incentives and rates remission, much of the vacant space in the area could be brought back into use, preferably as residential accommodation, while any new infill schemes would be required to have at least some apartments. All of this, and more, can be done if the will exists. Dublin has been a centre of paralysis for too long.

Jobs are a welcome spin-off from any development, but they should not become the determining factor – even in these hard times. In the case of Irish Life's monster office project at George's Quay, apologists did not rely on the intrinsic worth of the scheme, which is non-existent, or its architecture, which is awful, or on how it will complement the Custom House (it won't). Instead, they trotted out the tired, old famine relief argument that it 'will put bread on the tables of 1,200 construction workers'. It is surely not the primary function of the planning process to create jobs, even for unemployed brickies and their mates. Does anyone know or even care how many jobs were created in the 1780s when John Beresford and James Gandon were building the Custom House? The only criterion must be whether what is being proposed is a good or a bad development, a welcome or unwelcome addition to the streetscape and the life of the city. To argue otherwise is tantamount to suggesting that the IDA should grant-aid factories to manufacture mustard gas or nuclear weapons, merely to create jobs. Neither should we fall for the argument used by the CIF, among others, that the planning process itself is some sort of black hole. Public participation in the system is one of its essential ingredients, and the right of conservation groups and other third parties to appeal to Bord Pleanala must be jealously guarded. If that right did not exist, we might be well on the way to having gas caverns in Dublin Bay, among many other undesirable developments. The restructured board, in any case, has shown that it is quite capable of dealing expeditiously with appeals, so the complaint of endless delays may be counted as bogus. It also goes without saying that any move to interfere with the independence of Bord Pleanala must be strenuously resisted – though the board could do with clearer policy guidelines to provide

a framework for its decisions. Nobody, apart perhaps from certain elements in Fianna Fáil, would wish to see it packed once again with political hacks.

That leaves just one matter to be dealt with – what might be called the Gouger Factor. Either we have planning laws or we don't. If we do, then they should be rigorously enforced. Speculators who demolish a listed building without planning permission must be required by law, as they are in Denmark, to rebuild it brick by brick, or stone by stone. And those who erect what is euphemistically known as an 'unauthorised development' must be required to take it down. Failing compliance, in either case, the culprits should be sent to prison. For it is one of the extraordinary features of the destruction of Dublin that not once has any errant developer had to spend even a single day behind bars. The certain prospect of a cold cell in Mountjoy Jail would be a mighty deterrent for most of them.

As for the rest of us, the innocent onlookers, our civic duty is to speak out. If we don't like what is happening to our city, we must make our voices heard loudly and clearly. For a start, we might adopt the line repeated over and over again by Peter Finch in the film *Network*. Playing a crazed evangelical newscaster upset about the state of things, he urged his television audience to stand up and say: 'We're mad as hell and we're not going to take it anymore.'

It won't solve Dublin's problems. But it might help.

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